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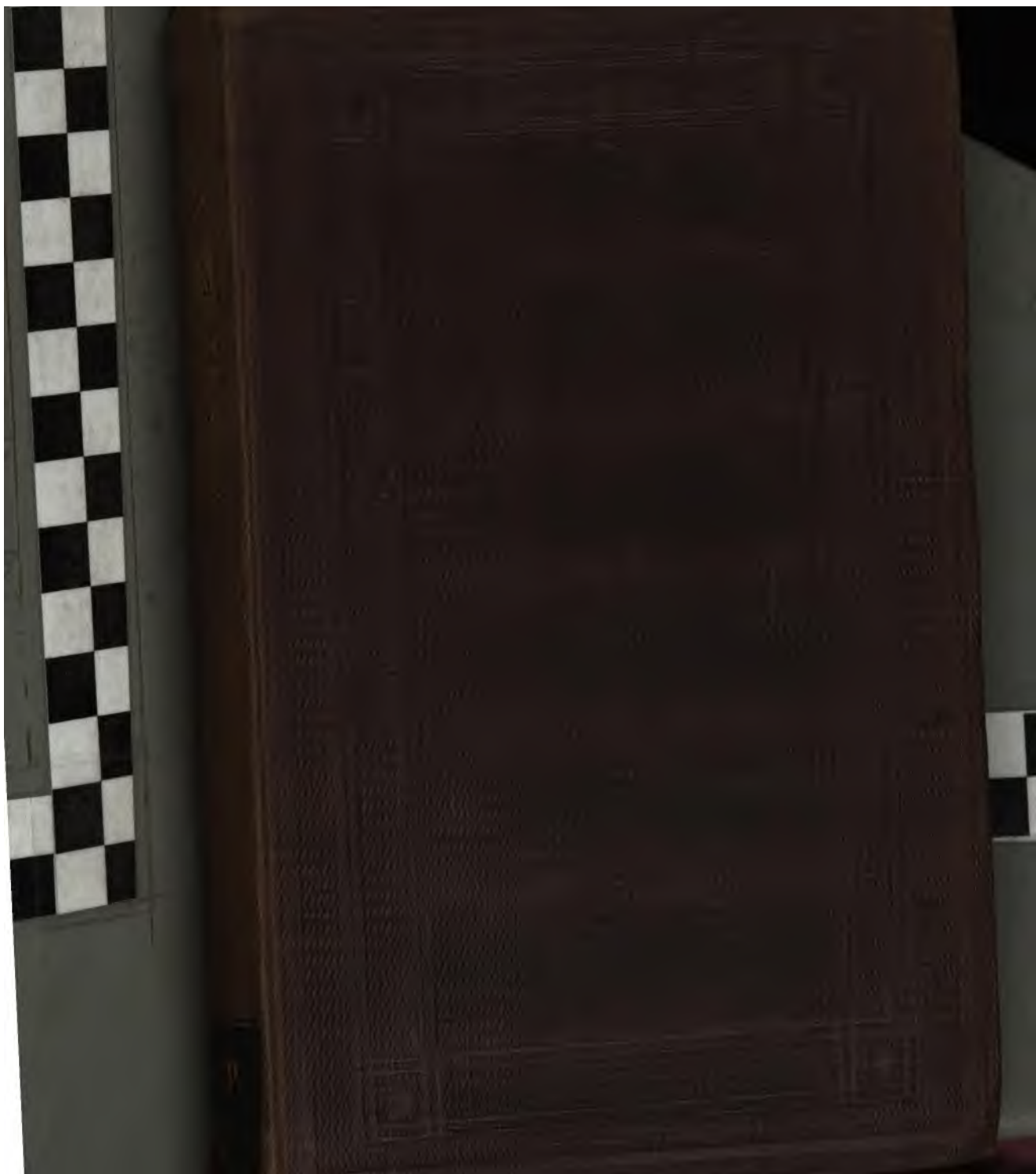
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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S
FORTUNES.

BY HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF

"SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "WARP AND WOOF,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S FORTUNES.

PART FIRST.

THE ELDER GENERATION.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

HOME.

Glad sight whenever new with old
Is joined through some dear home-born tie ;
The life of all that we behold
Depends upon that mystery.—WORDSWORTH.

I.

It was like a dream ! From her own window—the window of her own dear old room *at home*—Rachel Withers was looking over the wide moorland, wrapt in its rich purple August mantle, where the sunset glowed with a fervent heat, and the winds that were never still frolicked roughly by in their breezy play ;

over the ripening cornfields, and hilly pastures, and warm-scented fir-woods to Hurtle-Force, where the river rushed down the rocks in two great silvery leaps, then, in a shallow, stone-encumbered bed, wound its devious way through the beautiful little valley, past the church, past Prior's Mill, under the steep arch of Riccall bridge, by Brafferton and Floyd's Seat, to the wider levels of the plain, where it was lost in a hazy glory of gold and crimson evening clouds.

Oh! the delight of being at home again in these wild, familiar scenes! The people welcomed them back as they might have welcomed kinsfolk, and an exile of six years had only made their old pastor's children love them better. There was very little change either within or without the rectory. A few faces of ancient friends had disappeared, and some of the unkempt bairns had grown up into rough-hewn men and women; but there had been no wholesale emigrations such as occur in less isolated places, and all the families were still where they were. The parish was wide and scattered, but John Withers was vigorous, and hard walking never came amiss to him, any more than it had done to his father. He was off up the dale now to the Hurtlemere House, where Sir William Warleigh was staying for

the shooting. Rachel would have accompanied him, but they did not know who was there besides; Laurence they were sure was abroad, and the girls had not appeared at church yet; while sleek, crafty, velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws was never a favourite of hers.

In-doors they were quite settled already. As Mr. Brooke took the household plenishing off their hands when they went away, so they had taken it back off his widow's hands when she was obliged to leave. Thus, each piece of furniture was an intimate acquaintance, and as the Brookes were a thrifty, childless couple, nothing looked the worse for its alien service. The carved oak that their parents gathered together when they were married, suited the wainscoted rooms; for, if quaint and cumbrous, it was also rich. It was a pleasure inexpressible for Rachel to help John in putting the precious volumes of their father's library up on their old shelves, and, as nearly as they could recollect, in their old places, until, now that they were arranged, they looked as if they had never been away. The garden had been beautifully kept in their absence, and Kester Greaves, who was the Brookes' *odd man*, remained with them in the same capacity; Mary Deane, the cook, also stayed, and Phemie, her cousin, as housemaid; and

they, with two dogs and a cat, made up the Withers' present domestic establishment.

Their old friends the Andersides were at Brafferton still, but the grey curate was gone—promoted to a parsonage of his own amongst the Potteries—and a Mr. Gilsland worked in his stead. He was a Trinity man like John Withers, but took his degree a year earlier. Their acquaintance was very slight while at Cambridge, but they seemed disposed now to cultivate each other's society ; and Mr. Gilsland congratulated himself loudly on meeting with a civilized companion amongst the *barbarians*, as he called the canny dales' folk. Rachel was surprised that he did not appreciate them more highly ; the rough humour and strong practical sense that distinguished them were traits of character which she thought most men would have valued. A plain, home-spun race they undeniably were, and blunt and independent in their ways, but also they were full of honest self-respect and of a simple, sincere kindness that usually proved most attachable qualities between priest and people. John Withers vowed that he would rather lay his bones in the dust of Hurtleale than migrate even to a bishopric, and of the same counsel was his sister ; for oh, how bonnie the familiar landscape looked that night, how freshly the native air blew in on her

brow through the open window ! She could almost have cried for joy when she thought they were at home once more—*at home* once more !

Their father had been rector of Hurtledale for nearly forty years, and had survived the loss of his wife only three months, dying a few days after his son's ordination. John was Rachel's elder by ten years ; he was the firstborn of his mother, and she was her little reckling. Of the three children who came between them not one outlived the perils of infancy. They left home, therefore, in the early days of their mourning, brother and sister, alone in the world, yet they left it divided ; John to go to his first curacy in Wales, and Rachel to encounter the unknown hardships of life at school. It was terrible to look forward to, but, after all, she was very happy there. She would not have forgotten any of the time between then and now if she could, or any of the friends she found amongst her young companions. There was great pleasure in that enthusiasm of girls' love, and she counted those white days long on which their letters came ; though she had begun to see that the glory of it must soon pass away, and that already two or three were falling off from the list, absorbed into hopes and cares and duties other than those of visionary youth.

John laughed at her romance, but he had quite as strong a genius for friendship as herself. Were not Arthur Hill and he almost more than brothers? It was always gala-day when they two met after ever so brief a separation, and John was the better for it a whole month after. They were not likely to come together at present however, for Arthur Hill had just gone abroad as travelling tutor with a young Scotch nobleman, and was not to return to Hurtleddale for a year or more. John had hoped to catch him, were it only for a single day, before his departure; but the first news he heard when he arrived at the rectory with his sister was, that Arthur Hill had been over the previous evening to see if they were come, as he was setting off to Carlisle to join his charge early on the following day. This was a great disappointment to both, and it seemed the more grievous that they had thus missed each other by only a few hours. But except this one cross to their anticipations, the Withers' had had a perfectly happy return to Hurtleddale.

II.

Rachel Withers was a sensible, well-principled, every-day young woman, not pretty, but pleasing; plump, rosy, good-humoured and healthy; not romantic to look at, but with a fund of real romance in her heart. She was one of those happy-tempered people who never quite outlive their illusions. Any child of average expertness might have taken her in, for she never suspected bad motives or was afflicted with mean suspicions. She believed all the world to be as sincere, straightforward, and kindly disposed as herself; but do not from this argue her a fool. She was only eighteen, and had lived her life hitherto amongst honest people.

She esteemed it a happy fate to be elected her brother's housekeeper on leaving school, instead of having to turn out into the world to fight her way amongst strangers—a possibility which judicious friends had considered it a duty to keep well before her eyes during the progress of her education, that she might be broken in to the idea of work if it became practically desirable in the end that she should undertake it. If John should marry, then the chances were that she would have to go adrift on some course of her own, for though she had a

little money she had not a competence; but that might be a long day first, and as previsions of evil are foolish, and she was of a cheerful disposition, she put them resolutely away from her mind, and would none of their harassment.

She soon began to have her share of the parish work tolerably well in hand. There was no extreme poverty amongst the people. It was possible to know the ways and means of every man, woman, and child in the dale, and to prevent by timely aid of one kind or another the sharp pinch of such necessity as often cripples the poor of great towns in seasons of scarcity. The faces of the little ones at school were full and ruddy enough, and when the bairns are not pined things are never much amiss with the locker at home. Her chief misgiving as to how she should get on in her office of purveyor of the rectory charities, was that she could not bear to see physical want of any kind without wishing to relieve it; and experienced persons warned her that such appearances were apt to be deceitful; she could not offer a good book and advice in lieu of bread and brands if signs of hunger and a cold hearthstone met her eyes; and she would certainly rather give to six who had no need, and who were taking her in, than send one poor body faint and empty away. By and by, like

other beginners, she would learn to discriminate between real and feigned or *earned* distress, John encouragingly said, but meanwhile she must not expect to go quite scot-free from mistakes and their vexatious consequences. Mary Deane promised to be a great assistance to her when she was in doubt or difficulty; a shrewd dales-woman herself, and many years servant at the rectory, she was beforehand with those who tried to impose on her young mistress; but at the same time she was always ready with a good word for such as deserved one. She mentioned Effie Benson, for instance, as a worthy woman both meriting and requiring little occasional helps.

“She puts on a fair face afore folk, but she’s worse off than a many that looks downright starved,” was Mary’s testimony. “She’s that clean you might eat your dinner off of her stone floor, and that proud she would not beg bit nor sup if she were dying o’ want. They are often that way—them that has seen better days. There’s handsome things in her house, and the walls is her own, and the roof’s her own, and the patch o’ ground’s her own, but I’m thinking that’s well nigh all she has except the four pounds o’ rent she gets for the paddock that’s let to Robb at Prior’s Mill. And she’s past work if ever she were fit for

much, which maybe she wasn't. She knitted socks for old master; but Mr. Withers doesn't happen wear worsted socks?" Yes, he did, and that reminded Rachel that he would want new ones for the coming winter: therefore Effie should have the pins and the yarn to-morrow.

Then amongst those Mary would fain have discouraged, there was Ally Wray, whom Rachel recollected at perpetual feud with her old man, since whose death she had come out quite a changed character—at least as far as tongue goes. When Rachel went to pay her her first visit Ally whined, and shook her head, and talked *goody* in the most amazing manner; lamenting her dear Cranky—with whom she had quarrelled actively and passively every day of his life—as if they had been the most affectionate and united couple in the dale. "Auld Cant," Mary called her, and doled out her share of soup with grumbling reluctance. Mr. Anderside had a queer story against two of his nieces, simple, worthy ladies, whom she had completely hoodwinked with her pious talk. They put her into a pathetic little tract, and when they left Hurtle-dale, they sent copies of it to the school for distribution; since which revelation of her successful pretences, Ally had been esteemed by her neighbours wickeder than ever;

indeed the flimsy romance was a study more curious than edifying to those who knew Ally's choice familiar phrases, her fables and her hypocrisies; but Auld Cant though she was, Rachel would not curtail her of her flannel or her soup, even at Mary's indignant suggestion; for she was nearly destitute, and had only a half-witted son to work for her.

The village school-mistress was a fagged, lean, white little woman who always looked at the last gasp of weariness; but she contrived to get through her business well, and to make the girls neat plain sewers. To Rachel's great satisfaction she found none of them cobbling at bits of coarse, muslin embroidery, and the most primitive notions of usefulness still prevailed amongst them. The schoolmaster had also a jaded and over-worked appearance, and he worried the boys with too much preaching; but he and his wife were a respectable, worthy couple, and when they had a better system to go upon would neither wear out themselves nor their scholars so much as they had done. Mrs. Brooke confessed to Rachel that she never could take a real interest in the schools; consequently they were not well overlooked, and many things would bear improvement.

Mr. Gilsland was pleased to laugh at what he called Rachel's laborious energy as a reformer—

though indeed she had accomplished nothing yet—and to predict speedy fatigue. “New brooms sweep clean,” said he, speaking proverbially; “but they wear out and grow slack at their work in time. For my part, I know no more unthankful duty than that of trying to raise the condition of these cloddish barbarians.”

Rachel could not agree with him, neither could John; but then they had been born and bred amongst the people, and were as familiar with their sterling virtues as with their harsh speech and rough manners. This Mr. Gilsland was not. He had come amongst them a stranger, apparently with pre-conceived notions of rustical picturesqueness and simplicity; and being rudely disenchanted by his first impressions, did not seem to have cared to try whether the ore below the surface was worth labouring or not; and thus he found no pleasure in a lot which had some of the happiest opportunities in the world. John Withers endeavoured to convince him of his error; for he did not like to see a man falling weary of his duties, and yielding to discouragement without an effort to withstand its deadening influence; but his success was very partial; for Mr. Gilsland was not a person easily moved to give up a prejudice when his personal tastes and refinements were involved therein.


III.

When John Withers and his sister came home again to Hurtleale, Mrs. Sara Grandage, Rachel's godmamma, was away in Scotland, but she presently returned, and on the morrow after they heard of her arrival, they went over to pay her a visit in her delicious old nest at Prior's Bank. She vivaciously declared herself neither a day older nor a day worse than when they left her six years before, and was as full of pleasant, satirical speeches as ever. Bittersweet was the old lady's name with them formerly, and Bittersweet would she be as long as there was an atom of her left. They found her in the garden, leaning on her tall stick, and presiding over the labours of three weeding boys, to whose diligence she gave anything but commendatory testimony.

"One boy is a boy," said she; "two boys are half a boy, and three boys are no boy at all, unless you have your eye on them at every moment." And then she marshalled them round the bank, pointing out her alterations and confessing with much truth that her pet shrubs took almost too much exercise for health in their transplanting and re-transplanting. The main features of the place would continue always the same in their romantic beauty, but every little

detail seemed to have undergone a change since the Withers' saw it last. There was a new wild-flower walk winding round by the river under the ash-trees that was charming. Mrs. Sara Grandage had had the plants brought from far and near, and even from abroad to garnish it; and in the spring it looked like fairy-land with its splendour of gentian and violet, primrose and anemone, bluebell and daffodil, overhung and mingled in with rare choice ferns which flourished luxuriantly in the warm, moist, sheltered nooks of the rocks. Rachel felt tired after their three-mile walk, but her godmamma was as brisk as a bee, and kept them out full an hour in the sun before she dared plead a reasonable fatigue. Twice John tried to beguile her indoors, but she would not go until she pleased, and then it was almost time to set out on their return. She insisted, however, on their remaining to drink tea, and bribed John to consent by promising them the pony carriage and Clip, her factotum, to drive them home in the moonlight over the moor.

Whether Bittersweet grew older or not must be left to her own feelings, but she certainly grew smaller in the world. As she sat perched in her high-cushioned chair before the table, daintily sipping her costly tea, Rachel thought she had never seen



anything human so wee or so witch-like. Malice twinkled in her bright black eye, and what in other old folk's faces would be called crowsfeet, in hers were the curls of laughter and of merry mockery that had not yet by any means mocked or laughed their last.

"Well, Johnny man," said she, after critically considering him for several silent minutes; "your beard is grown, and it is not red after all—perhaps you are not such a pepper-box as you used to be? Clip protests you are grand in the pulpit—six foot if you are an inch. And he allows that you preach *middlin'*. I shall come and hear you myself, though what a lad like you can have to tell an old woman who has known sixty years of the ups and downs of the world I cannot guess! I hope you don't give more than twenty minutes' sermon? I never had much taste for long sermons since I fell asleep under your grandfather's, which had as many heads as Hydra and always hummed over the hour. If they could all have hummed together it would have abridged the discourse and have been a mighty improvement."

The old lady then turned her pointed observation on Rachel, and was graciously pleased to say that she had not come home spoilt, so far as she could detect. "John has appropriated more than his share

of the family beauty, but your face will wear well, Mistress Rachel," continued she. "It will wear well, and you will be handsomer at eight-and-thirty than you are at eighteen; and eight-and-thirty is a very trying period for a woman, let me tell you, especially if she be single. I call it the grizzling age when one is neither old nor young, and when whatever is ugly in temper or character comes out and stamps the countenance for the rest of a lifetime. Cultivate your cheerfulness, my dear, and your faculty of enjoying little present pleasures, and you will find yourself at sixty lively and evergreen still."

Then she gossiped of her friends and neighbours near and remote; told her young guests how she thought Kitty Anderside had done foolishly in refusing to accompany the grey curate to the Potteries; how Mr. Gilsland was not—in her opinion—worth his shoe-leather as a hill-pastor; how Sir William Warleigh had driven his elder son abroad by his persecutions; how Oliver had contracted a prudent marriage with a well-dowered widow lady considerably older than himself; and how, finally, the girls were just as solitary and neglected as ever.

"Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe is their one friend," said she; "and even her daughters do not

go to Whinstane. In fact no gentlewoman but Mrs. Damer Warleigh ever does go to Whinstane. Sir William boozes with his grooms and other questionable company—the only company he can command—and she would stay away but for a promise she made to their mother when she was dying. Somebody told me they were up at the Hurtlemere House now with their father, but I have never seen them about; perhaps he will not let them go beyond the gates here any more than at Whinstane.”

John Withers said he could not enlighten her. When he paid his visit of ceremony Sir William was out in the woods, and the great pew in the church had been unoccupied last Sunday. Sir William had not called at the rectory since, and they had seen no one from the Hurtlemere House of whom they could inquire. But if the girls were really there, he hoped Rachel would see them soon and renew their acquaintance.

IV.

The evening next after this, Mr. Anderside spent at the rectory, and on some reference being made by Rachel Withers to Sir William Warleigh and his peculiar ways, the old gentleman startled his host by

exclaiming contemptuously, "Sir William is a Warleigh by name only—not one drop of the blood of that ancient and respectable stock flows in his veins! Colonel Warleigh of Penslaven picked him up by mischance during a night-ride from his cousin's house at Bristowe—an ugly, wide-mouthed, swarthy brat, dropped by some travelling tinker's drab, and left to perish in the snow. The colonel was not commonly a humane man—rather the reverse, indeed—but he heard the child squeal, dismounted, lifted it out of the mire, and carried it home to Penslaven, when the kitchen-wench brought it up in conjunction with the grooms until it developed into the wickedest imp that perhaps ever came on earth for the furtherance of its father's business!"

This was one of the secrets that everybody knows, and that nobody much cares to talk about. The circumstances happened long before Rachel or John Withers was born—full fifty years ago—but they were not of a nature to be forgotten until after the lapse of generations. Neither John nor his sister had, however, any knowledge of them beyond common report, which had clouded the original event with a haze of supernatural traditions, the property of every winter fireside story-teller in the dales. They were glad therefore to have lit upon an authentic source of

information, and Mr. Anderside was probably the most authentic now in existence; for he had been curate at Penslaven when the incident took place. John and Rachel both questioned him, and he told them the story as far as he knew it; premising that his old patron, the colonel himself, had done his utmost to envelope the beginnings of it in mystery, and to discourage any inquiry that might have brought the simple facts to light.

The world in general and Colonel Warleigh's near connexions in particular, he said, excused his eccentricities on the plea that he was rather mad; and some such plea was needed when, having quarrelled with his cousin Damer, and being himself wifeless and childless, he devised the mortifying expedient of educating his beggar's brat, of giving him his name and making him his heir. Thenceforward the misshapen urchin was Master William Warleigh. Tailors clothed him, tutors laboured at him, toadies flattered him, and he became a man—a man characterized by a low shrewdness, a malignant cunning, and a dastardly tyrannical spirit. In due time Colonel Warleigh married him to a very youthful, pretty, proud girl, who with her little fortune had been unwisely committed to his guardianship; and she, having borne him four children, and suffered his

brutality twelve years, broke her heart and died. There was a portrait of her hanging still in the great drawing-room at Whinstane Tower—a delicate, fair-skinned, dark-eyed woman, handsome and imperious—the process of breaking such a woman's heart must have been cruel, but Sir William did it.

One of the grewsome dales' legends said that Lady Warleigh walked and wept still in the great chambers at Whinstane Tower just as she did in her lifetime; and certain it was that from the day of her burial the most intimate scene of her endurance had been locked, barred, and sealed against every intruder, and her husband betook himself for his nightly rest to a room in the servants' quarters, where he lay upon a sofa with a rug over him, and fire and candles burning all the year round. He had a right to be haunted by an evil conscience if ever man had; but the vault in Penslaven Church must have been far, far too welcome a refuge for his wife that she should ever be tempted to stray back to Whinstane Tower where her degrading martyrdom was undergone.

In answer to some further inquiries from John Withers, Mr. Anderside told them that Colonel Warleigh had lived long enough to fear and distrust his adopted heir, and to love and cherish the little Laurence—eldest born son of that ill-omened mar-

riage. He paid a heavy penalty for the indulgence of his vindictive caprices; for as he grew old and feeble, he found a bitter tyrant in Sir William—that graceless savage in looks and manners, lower in all his passions and instincts than the horse he rode or the dogs he thrashed. When he died, Sir William became undisputed master of Penslaven and Whinstanedale; master of four children, living reminders of his half-murdered wife; master of a pack of hounds and a pack of servants, each one of whom, dogs as well as men, was his superior. His baronetcy, a parliamentary bribe, his rank as county magnate and member, and his power as a great landed proprietor made his name notorious. He was a man hated and feared—a man to whom soon none but the basest and most servile of his class would extend the hand of fellowship. Penslaven he let as soon as it became his own, continuing to live on at Whinstane Tower with his two sons and two daughters, who were growing up into men and women, while he was scarcely past middle age; for Colonel Warleigh had married him to his unhappy wife very young, and the children had been born early and in rapid succession.

Mr. Hill, who got the living of Penslaven when Mr. Anderside's rector was removed to a deanery, gave them all lessons together, and as nature had not


withheld from them capacity, they had made their profit out of them. He considered them a very peculiar group of young people. Nothing knew they of the facts of their paternity. They contemplated the fine old Warleigh portraits with undisturbed complacency as the portraits of their veritable progenitors, and, apparently, never speculated how such a boor as their father, with the flat head and bull neck, could have sprung from that ancient and courtly stock. They even picked out Warleigh features and Warleigh traits of character in each other, and accounted for them by line and rule of the family traditions—and it was undeniable that such features and such traits they actually possessed, though how they came by them was an inexplicable enigma to the gossips.

Rachel Withers had a dim recollection of the girls as children when she was a very little child herself, and also of once seeing their mother in the fir-wood behind the Hurtlemere House, walking and talking with her own. This was the last time Lady Warleigh was ever in the dale. Two or three years later, John Withers and Laurence Warleigh struck up a staunch alliance, which was periodically renewed when Sir William came over in August, and brought his family to remain a month. Boys and girls both ran

wild, and the young Withers' with them. Indeed, when they were all together, they were not easy to keep within bounds. Rachel remembered the fragile thing Grace was very distinctly, and how Laurence used to carry her pick-a-back when she felt tired on their rambles. Katherine was much stronger, and very independent. She liked them all except Oliver, who, John used to say, was *sly*; she did not know of her own knowledge that he was sly, but she knew that he was cruel to animals, and that he had an ugly, sneering mouth, like the picture of Apollyon in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that they called him, even to his face, "velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws."

Mr. Anderside spoke of Laurence Warleigh as of one who had originally the making of a fine character in him. He had a rash and hasty temper, but he was affectionate and generous, and there was a warm-hearted sincerity about him that Oliver totally lacked. Oliver, he said, was always quiet and ready, with considerable ability, ambition, and guile. He had never come to open quarrel with Sir William, as had done his more impetuous brother, and long since he began to find his advantage in a wily forbearance. Everybody about Whinstane knew who was the favourite son.

Oliver also had fared better with respect to education than Laurence; he was sent to a public school and afterwards to Cambridge, while Laurence was never away from the dales until he was nearly twenty. At Mrs. Damer Warleigh's instance, he was then permitted to go abroad with a fit companion for three years of foreign travel. Returning home at the expiration of his leave of absence, the coarse, domineering habits of his father revolted him. He found himself, though a man, still checked, thwarted, and tasked like a school-boy. Incessant quarrels arose, and his life at Whinstane Tower became, at length, an existence of dull, degrading misery. He first remonstrated, then resisted, and finally—for peace sake, and because he saw no term to his persecutions—left home altogether. Sir William refused to make him any allowance, and for nearly seven years he had been wandering to and fro the world, subsisting on the little means he derived from the sheepwalks of Hurtleale, which he possessed independent of his father. The old Hurtlemere House and two farms adjacent were bequeathed to him by his godfather, Moor Murray, a famous Nimrod in his generation, who lived in those parts a life of contented savagery, and died while Laurence was still a boy. Since Moor Murray's death, the



Hurtlemere House had served humbly as a farmstead, two or three apartments only being kept up for the use of Sir William and those he brought over for the shooting.

During the past year Sir William was said to have frequently urged his elder son's return, promising him a sufficient income if he would marry and settle as the heir to great estates should; but Laurence either did not like the lady of his father's selection, or else he found the sweets of liberty more precious than the bonds of Whinstane, howsoever shared and gilded; for hitherto he had invariably declined compliance. No one who knew the coarse, ruffianly man his father was, could wonder at his refusal. Mr. Anderside considered it wise in every way.

Oliver had married at three-and-twenty, and married satisfactorily to his father; but he lived away from home, and thus perhaps the more easily kept on excellent terms with him. It was asserted that Sir William would have dearly liked to give him the privileges of an elder son over Laurence's head, but Colonel Warleigh had made the entail as strict as by law he could, and not one stick or stone about Penslaven or Whinstandale could be alienated without the heir's consent. Lucky for him that it could not.

About the girls Mr. Anderside could tell Rachel nothing; he had not seen them for years—never since Laurence went abroad for the first time. They went nowhere into society, not even to Bristowe, and were supposed to live secluded as nuns. *Girls*, the old man called them, but they were mature women; Katherine being twenty-four, and Grace only one year younger. In experience and knowledge of the world, however, they were mere children.

Lady Foulis, the old colonel's half-sister, was in being still, and still shut up in her turret at Whinstane where he left her. But that fire and faggot had ceased to burn upon the gallows' knowe, she might long ere this have made a weird witch-light in the world; for lapse of time had by no means sweetened her evil reputation, and when folks mentioned her name they uttered it with bated breath even yet.

Thus much of the popular history of the Warleighs, antecedent to the date of the Withers' return to Hurtleale, Mr. Anderside made known to his young friends, and it was pretty nearly all there was to tell, except what was conjectural.

V.

Sir William Warleigh's daughters were with him at the Hurtlemere House, as Mrs. Sara Grandage had told her godchild, and the next Sunday they appeared at church. On the following morning they called at the rectory; it was nearly ten years since Rachel had seen them, and they met almost like strangers.

The sisters had both grown up with their mother's proud, pure type of face, but they looked shy and shivery, like women who have never known the warm cherishing of affection. They appeared reserved, too, — Katherine almost icily so — but Rachel fancied it was more from habit, and the life they led, than from natural disposition, and that it would wear off on longer acquaintance. John Withers was not at home when they called, but as Rachel felt sure that he would be disappointed at missing them, she begged them to stay to luncheon; but they declined, and seemed immediately rather in haste to be gone, which made her at once suspect that this was a stolen visit, — and so it was. Just as they were taking leave, however, in John came, and a delay necessarily ensued. He had one or two reminiscences in common with them, which Rachel

did not share; in particular they had Arthur Hill to talk about, and John was glad to hear later news of him than any he possessed.

By and by, Katherine thawed from her cold demeanour, and Grace spoke out with an almost childlike impulsiveness, when the newness of the meeting was got over. Grace had an exceedingly sweet, attractive smile, and only wanted a little more ease and vivacity to be charming; and from a certain expression and tone that betrayed her in speaking of Arthur Hill, Rachel shrewdly imagined that, secluded as might be the existence she and her sister were condemned to, they were not quite shut out from natural sympathies and interests. Finally, they were prevailed on to eat their luncheon at the rectory, and afterwards John Withers and his sister walked with them over the fell, nearly as far as the Mere. Out of doors they expanded almost into sociability, checking themselves now and then as young people do who fear they are saying too much, or making themselves over-familiar. They both evidently possessed an undeveloped capacity for being happy, and tempers less high and elastic would have suffered far more than theirs had done from the unhealthy restraint and monotony of Whinstane. Throughout the whole conversation

they never alluded once to anything that was unusual in their position. They spoke of Laurence with great affection, and Grace hoped he would come home before Christmas; Katherine said nothing of *her* hopes, but from the sigh that followed her sister's words, Rachel felt sure she had no expectation of his return—perhaps, even she did not desire it, or dreaded the renewal of the daily disputes that had embittered their lives when they were together formerly. Oliver was not mentioned amongst them.

That the events within their experience had been few was manifest from the vividness with which they recalled several half-forgotten exploits to the minds of their early playfellows. Katherine asked if they remembered escaping with Laurence and herself to the Force, and paddling across the river, shoeless and stockingless, to be caught by their father on the other side, and marched home in disgrace. Rachel—a perfect tomboy in her childhood—recalled it well as a tragical incident, attended with penalties for disobedience, and serious warnings that they would all come to be drowned some day if they ventured on repeating the experiment; recalled that, and much more, when the chords of memory were thus pleasantly struck.

"Oh, yes, I remember," said she, her face brightening with the reflection of those sunny days. "We were very happy when we were little things. But that was a naughty prank, and we did grievous penance for it, John and I. Thenceforward we refrained from the river with its strong eddies and deep pools, and were content with the lesser dangers of the High-beck, where the slippery stepping-stones were a perpetual temptation and delight. I can hear mamma's gentle admonition now, 'Children, you had better come round by the bridge;' and nurse's shrill outcry of 'Bairns, I'll no' ha' you wetting your feet!' as we followed in single file over the perilous crags. Many a fall and many a ducking did we get when the beck was full, but we never gave up the stepping-stones until we gave up home and all. Oh, yes, I remember!"

Even during the short time they were together that morning, Rachel Withers found out that the tastes of her companions were as simple as their education had been narrow. "We have no accomplishments—we can read," said Katherine, with a peculiar smile, half sad, half mocking, on her beautiful lip. "We can read, and that is all." Yet two faces more refined and intelligent John Withers thought he had never seen.

They had just reached the stile into the fir-wood, and were preparing to part, with mutual expressions of pleasure at having renewed their acquaintance, when Sir William Warleigh confronted them, coming up the path with his gun over his shoulder, and his dogs at his heels. There was no time for evasion, and, perhaps, it was as well; though Katherine's heightened colour and Grace's timid eye betrayed that their first impulse was to run away. He came close before he appeared to recognize John Withers and Rachel, and, touching his cap with ironical civility, was about to pass on without a word, when Katherine plucked up a sudden spirit, and asked if he had forgotten them. No, he had not forgotten them, replied the old bear, but he was after birds of another feather just then. And so he left them, looking uglier, more ungainly, and more inhospitable in Rachel's dismayed eyes than ever man looked before. To his daughters, his behaviour was a mere matter of course.

"We shall come and see you again, if we may," Grace said, nervously; and Rachel replied that she should be glad to see them whenever they liked; on which Katherine bade her, if they did not present themselves at the rectory any more, understand that they might not walk so far alone—

which both John and she felt implied the probability of Sir William's placing a veto on their acquaintance. And with that they parted.

VI.

Though Sir William Warleigh appeared to live in a state of chronic suspicion of servants, children, and all about him, he yet did not see fit to lay any restrictions on his daughters' visits to the rectory—a forbearance for which they seemed hardly able to account, though they took the fullest advantage of it. They were there nearly every day, and always found a warm welcome both from Rachel and her brother. It was so pleasant and cheering to be with them, Katherine said, that when the time came to go back to Whinstane, they should find the Tower lonelier and drearier than ever. They loved a good talk, and asked a thousand questions of the ways and manners of the world beyond the dales, which Rachel and even John could answer but very imperfectly—cast as their lots had been in the quietest places. But they were curiously ignorant, and found matter for interest and speculation in the most trifling details. Katherine had the stronger mind of the two, but

Grace had the tenderer character. Rachel was not mistaken in her sentimental conjectures : Grace and Arthur Hill had a sort of engagement pending between them, known to his friends, but not yet confessed to Sir William, and whether it would ever come to anything Grace despondently doubted. Intimacy ripens fast amongst young people who begin it with a friendly disposition, and before the girls had known each other a week, they had had this tender subject under discussion a score of times.

In a recent letter to John Withers, Arthur Hill had told his story too, and asked his friend's counsel and opinion ; but John, in reply, had declared himself utterly inexperienced, and would not accept the responsibility of advising him on a matter so delicate and critical. This plea of inexperience was not likely to be worth much very long now, however, for John had begun to sing Katherine's praises in his sister's ears every hour of the day ; and in their walks over the moor, to take the girls home after their visits to the rectory, they always paired off together, leaving Rachel and Grace to cultivate each other's conversation uninterruptedly.

One afternoon at this juncture, Mrs. Sara Grandage, driving over to the rectory to see her

god-daughter, arrived at the moment when the sociable little group were about to set off to the Force. She, good-naturedly, refused to detain them then, but, to indemnify herself for the present disappointment, made them all promise to go to Prior's Bank to luncheon on the following day.

Rachel went in the morning early, but John had business on hand which kept him at home until afternoon; when he arrived at last, however, he found Katherine and Grace Warleigh both there, and sly old Bittersweet, from a wicked glance she gave him, betrayed herself as archly suspicious of his budding sentiments: he wondered whether Rachel had found him out, and had been saying anything. But no, Rachel looked calm and innocent. Mr. Gilsland had dropped in, and she was holding a little chat very agreeably with him. Rachel was no spoil-sport or premature meddler; she had far too much sympathy with her brother not to have put a just interpretation on his much-talk of Katherine, but she held her peace while she wished him good luck.

They were in the middle of the sitting when a carriage drove round to the door, and who should enter but Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe. Her face of pleased surprise as she scanned the gathering

was delightful to behold, and when she got Rachel Withers to herself for a moment she whispered, squeezing her hand with great energy,—

“My dear, if you can be kind to those poor girls, *do.*”

Rachel replied that they all had the best disposition in the world to improve each other's acquaintance. Mrs. Damer then inquired if Sir William knew of it, and expressed her astonishment that he had not peremptorily commanded its discontinuance; she afterwards, with Mrs. Sara Grandage's connivance, took Grace to talk to privately, and carried her off into the garden, where secrets were told and comfort administered. When they rejoined the party in the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later, Grace looked all the brighter and the better for her out-pouring in the shrubbery—Mrs. Damer had promised to befriend her cause when the time and opportunity arrived, and she might be relied on to do it.

She took her young kinswomen away with her when she left, and drove to the Hurtlemere House, though they warned her their father would not be found in-doors.

“So much the better if he is not,” replied she, without the slightest circumlocution. “And so much the pleasanter for all of us. I shall have done

my duty, and had my glimpse of you girls without any annoyance. Now tell me how you came to renew your acquaintance with John Withers and his sister—I approve of it thoroughly.”

And they told her, the talk lasting all the way up the hill to the Hurtlemere House, and as long as Mrs. Damer Warleigh’s leisure would allow her to listen to them afterwards.

Mrs. Sara Grandage was not the woman to lose the opportunity for a little social criticism when it fell in her way so conveniently as it did that afternoon; and as soon as the Bristowe carriage disappeared through the gates she began.

“The old generation is handsomer than the new—neither of those girls will ever match Mrs. Damer Warleigh,” said she, decisively.

John Withers admitted that she was a grand specimen of old lady-hood, but he maintained that Katherine was quite as fine-looking.

“Too pale and severe,” interposed Mr. Gilsland, in the tone of one who esteems himself a connoisseur. “I prefer a bright, sunshiny beauty, with more of colour and less of the statuesque.”

Rachel’s godmamma flashed a wicked glance in her face, and though, of course, the poor girl knew perfectly well that the handsome curate’s remark

could have no reference whatever to *her*, she felt herself blushing abominably. And Bittersweet's next words were not of a kind to cool her conscious cheeks. "You prefer the dumpling order of beauty then, Mr. Gilsland?" Now Dumpling was her pet name for Rachel, though she certainly had not qualified for it yet, whatever she might do, and the insinuation put her still further out of countenance.

"Well, yes; call it the dumpling order, if you like," said he, "but rosebud order would be prettier and more correctly descriptive," and then, either with or without intention, he looked aside at Rachel before her blush had gone down, and began making inquiries about Sir William Warleigh's reputed wealth.

"He is as rich as Croesus and as niggard as a Jew," replied Mrs. Sara Grandage, with malicious meaning in her heart. "He cannot but be rich, for his income is vast, and his expenditure nothing. Neither of his sons has an allowance from him, and I have heard him swear he will never give any man sixpence with his daughters. It would be a bad speculation to go wooing to Whinstane Tower, Mr. Gilsland, very bad." And here Bittersweet paused, with her short, dry cough, which she contrived to make so significant.

As John Withers walked home with his sister in the cool of the evening, he was very silent, turning over some serious thought in his mind. At last he spoke, saying, reflectively,—

“I am not sure that I like that Mr. Gilsland, Rachel; do you find him a pleasant person?”

Rachel said, “Yes,” but nothing more aloud. In fact, she had conceived some slight prepossession in the handsome curate's favour, and her brother's question startled her.

“So John does not like him—I wonder why,” she thought within herself; but no solution of his dislike presented itself to her, and she passed an evening of secret uneasiness and perplexity.

VII.

When Katherine Warleigh told Rachel Withers that she and her sister possessed no accomplishments, she spoke literally. No attempt had been made to give them the elegant education suited to their rank; they could not dance or draw, or play, or sing, or understand any language but their own; in that, however, they were so well versed that John Withers declared them to be the best informed women in their

national literature that he had ever met with. Katherine and he held long discussions on history, poetry and romance, and with Grace's appropriate quotations chiming in the trio were really very delightful for an ignoramus like Rachel to listen to. While those girls had browsed at large and at will in a vast library of good authors, she had been drilling in the bald routine of classes. Sometimes she was more than half inclined to wish she could exchange her own careful training and pruning for their luxuriant neglect; but John encouraged her to supply her deficiencies in a methodical way, and promised her a fair meed of success if she would devote a portion of each day to a regular course of study under his direction. This she gladly acceded to; for she felt very vacant-minded amongst well-read people. But school-bred girls always do; in fact, they have only just learned how to learn when they are launched on the world as finished and polished specimens of womankind.

The month of August was now getting over fast, and soon the rectory would lose its pleasant visitors—pleasant they were in every sense of the word. They had an air of taking refuge with Rachel as it were, though she was so much younger than themselves; and with John's aid she cheered them infinitely.

They were not like the same women they were a few weeks back ; they looked not only brighter in spirits but better in health.

“ Oh ! Whinstane is a weariful, weariful place,” said Katherine one day, in a moment of sudden expansion. “ I wish we were remaining at the Hurtlemere House through the winter, that we might keep the benefit of your society.”

John Withers and his sister heartily echoed the wish.

On another occasion she said to Rachel :—

“ If we can obtain leave to invite you to the Tower, will you come ? ”

The question took Rachel by surprise, and she glanced across at John who, for the instant, seemed as much startled as herself. Katherine saw the effect her unexpected demand had had on both, and, sighing, added hurriedly,

“ Perhaps it is useless to talk about anything so improbable. No one ever has been invited to Whinstane within my memory, and papa is not more hospitable than formerly.”

Nothing further was said on the subject then, but afterwards, when John and Rachel were alone, he asked her if she should hesitate about going to Whinstane were the chance given her. “ Because,”

continued he, "I wish for my sake you could and would."

"For your sake, Johnny?" echoed Rachel, with a little pretence of ignorance to draw him out; and then he began to speak of Katherine, and to tell her how he believed she was the one woman in the world who would make his life happy.

"Not yet. I have no intention of marrying *yet*," he ran on. "I am not even sure that she cares for me or would consent if I asked her."

Rachel was of opinion that she would, however; she thought the attraction was mutual; but she did not know that it would be right for her to say so, therefore she only reassured him with a promise that she would not be instrumental in ending their friendship by refusing to do anything in reason that might be required of her.

Whinstane Tower by all accounts could not be the most delightful place in the world to stay at, especially for a person so sensitive to the proprieties of life as Rachel Withers; but the risk of having to go there did not appear very imminent at present; therefore, though she would have done that and much more to please John or forward his interests, she set her mind at ease about it. But her brother continued to cherish the idea, and founded on it a good many

agreeable visions. Since Sir William Warleigh had been pleased to give a tacit consent to his daughters' intimacy at the rectory, it was within the range of possibilities that he might encourage it elsewhere. They had all met him one evening on the fells a long distance from home, and he had condescended so far as to inform them that there was a storm coming on. And it came—a terrific thunderstorm—before they could gain any shelter. This thunderstorm it was that brought John Withers' feelings to a crisis, and his wits to a distinct determination about his future life—Katherine was so beautifully calm through the danger; while Rachel was stunned and Grace nearly frightened to death. He had not *fallen in love*, as the saying is, but he knew that Katherine suited him; he was nearly thirty years old, and what he wanted in a wife was not a mere pretty sweetening or a house-proud mother dignity, but a pleasant and intelligent companion; and this she had the capacity to be to him more than any woman he had ever seen.

It would now have greatly relieved him to know what might be Sir William Warleigh's views about marrying his daughters; and this he saw no readier means of learning than through his sister's keeping up at Whinstane the intimacy that had opened so promisingly in Hurtleale.

VIII.

Mrs. Sara Grandage always gave three garden entertainments to her many friends during the continuance of the warm long days, and on the twenty-ninth of August she issued her invitations for the last picnic of the season ; fixing it for the fourth of September. The mountain-ash berries were red ripe already—earliest sign of the coming cold ; and harvest once over, winter came down on Hurtle-dale almost immediately.

There are few days long anticipated and anticipated with eager pleasure that do not turn out more or less of disappointments—and such a day was this to John Withers and Sir William Warleigh's daughters.

“ We shall not fail to be there,” were Katherine's last words on the previous evening when she parted with her friends at the stile leading into the fir-wood, and on reaching Prior's Bank the first news they heard was, “ You will not see your friends from the Hurtle-mere House to-day—they went off to Whinstane before six o'clock this morning. One of Sir William's vicious caprices, I suppose ! ”

Of course, John's pleasure in the day was gone, but Rachel made shift to enjoy it. Several old

friends were there whom they had not yet seen since their return to Hurtleddale—the Grantleys, Carltons, and Mr. Crofts, the grey curate, amongst the number, he in faithful attendance on his cruel Kitty Anderside. And Mr. Gilsland also appeared, though he had disquieted Rachel's thoughts by telling her beforehand he was afraid he should not be able to come; disquieted poor Rachel's thoughts that ran on the handsome curate now far more than was discreet.

She could not quite make out why he was not more popular in Hurtleddale. Everybody allowed that he was clever and gentlemanlike, but he was nowhere very cordially received. Only a few days ago at the rectory, Mr. Anderside, in speaking of him to John, had said before her, "Gilsland does not get on well with the people; they do not like his ways any more than he likes theirs, and I fear the fault lies with him." Now that struck her as unjust: why should the fault lie with him any more than with them? or why should it not, as faults mostly do, lie on both sides equally?

He was not in his right place, and he could not help feeling it and betraying that he felt it, she said in his excuse; and it was not very surprising that, after a public school and brilliant college life, a

young man should find a narrow country society irksome. The only trait in him that seemed to her unnatural was that he had so little faith in himself or in his future prospects. He appeared to have made up his mind already that he should live and die a poor, obscure, neglected curate; and poverty with obscurity wore the guise of terrible evils to him. He and Rachel had met very frequently on the neutral territory of Prior's Bank, which was about midway between Brafferton and the rectory, and whenever they had met he had poured out to her his desires, ambitions, dissatisfactions and grievances with a very fluent eloquence. She was a tender-hearted creature and had plenty of sympathy at his service. Not so Mrs. Sara Grandage—she had not common patience with him.

“What he wants is to walk straightway into some fat living, and to sit down in lazy dignity for the rest of his days,” she said, very tartly on one occasion, after he had entertained Rachel and herself with half an hour of complainings. “He is an inveterate grumbler and discontented person. What *is* he or what *has* he that he should pretend to be above his position here? Let him deserve a higher and he will get it.” Bittersweet had had a varied experience of life, and she always declared that people earned their precise

deserts; they won what they were worth, and if they were worth nothing they won nothing. Rachel heard, but refused to accept this article of her god-mamma's worldly creed without further observation with her own spectacles, because it bore hard on the unsuccessful and unlucky, whose lot, she thought, was heavy enough already without that last straw to break their backs; but there might be a general truth in it too, she candidly allowed.

Rachel was a common-place person herself, not given to chimerical troubles, and always preferring to behold the bright side of things; but that was temperament, constitutional cheerfulness, or what not. She would not have said that fainting was affectation because she never fainted, or that hysterics were rubbish because she could not have gone off into a fit if she had tried, or that low spirits were fancy because her own were tolerably equal; yet she had heard each and all of these assertions made by the non-afflicted. One step at a time in life is enough for most persons with the pleasures of hope before, but there are some who cannot rest content unless a good prospect lie assured in front. Of these last was Mr. Gilsland, Rachel said, and people called him self-seeking and disagreeable, because he was ill at ease in a circle where he did not feel himself

appreciated, and where he had no expectation of a change for the better. In a congenial sphere, and amongst congenial friends, she was sure he would be a pleasant friend himself. It almost provoked her to hear him spoken against—even John was not fair to him, and had begun to declare that he was a weariness to his spirit whenever he joined him for a walk on the moors!

“Of course,” she went on, a little hotly and hurriedly, when she saw the shrewd sarcasm with which Bittersweet heard her; “of course it is always wisest and safest to keep our little trials to ourselves, and not draw too often on the charity and consideration of our neighbours. Sunshine is very naturally preferred to shade, and those people go fastest and farthest who apply themselves to making things smooth and pleasant in this world. Perhaps Mr. Gilsland will by-and-by learn the wisdom of not seeking sympathy from such as have none to spare, and of practising silence about those aspirations and desires which all the wishing in the universe will not satisfy. John advises him to work, work, work, as the best and only means of filling his mind and his time, and thus excluding discontented reveries; but John does not perceive that Mr. Gilsland has none of his vigour, energy, or love for active labour.

They are differently made. John throws himself into his duty with all the eagerness that others spend in the pursuit of pleasure, and his duty is absolute pleasure to him, dear good fellow that he is ; but to Mr. Gilsland the same routine is the worst monotony of boredom !” Rachel was quite out of breath between tears and excitement when she came to the end of this little oration, and Mrs. Sara Grandage, in her amazed vexation at what her emotion betrayed, found not a single word at the moment wherewith to answer her. Rachel had excellent grounds for what she stated respecting Mr. Gilsland’s views of work : only the day before, with a rueful smile, he had given her a very explicit description of his labours and his feelings.

“ On Sunday,” said he, “ I preach twice to the barbarians who nod and yawn in my very face or sit open-mouthed and expectant, as if my words were tangible things to be physically swallowed and digested. Some few wave their heads with responsive groanings that make me imagine myself in Little Bethel, and the schoolmaster tattoos rapidly on the boys’ heads to keep them awake. When it is over, I go to my lodgings, depressed with the idea that not one soul of my congregation is the wiser or the better for any word of mine. I do not know how

to address these uncultured people; I have not the key to their prejudices or their tastes. I cannot be with them hail-fellow-well-met, like worthy Mr. Anderside, who goes into their cottages, and talks about the children, the pigs, the potato crops, and the complaints with as much interest and eloquence as he would bestow on matters of real significance. One old soul tells me at every visit that all her aches and pains proceed from 'habstraction on the brain!' and another has an unfailing source of lamentation in her 'poor, dear inside.' It is my business to listen and comfort, but I listen and am dumb. I had no vocation for the Church, and I ought never to have entered it."

Rachel did not ask him why then he had entered it. It struck on her very painfully that his heart was not in his work, and she knew as well as anybody that such work as his cannot be well done without good heart. She believed him conscientious, she understood the permanence of the holy orders he had taken upon himself, and she overflowed with feelings of pity and kindness towards him. So when her godmamma Grandage or any one else spoke of his shortcomings in duty or his general discontent, she rallied to his defence, and said her say in spite of them all. But if this good and guileless damsel

was deceived in the estimate she formed of the handsome curate's character, other persons were shrewd enough to take him at his just value, and that value was by no means a high one.

Mr. Gilsland spoke truly when he said that he had no vocation for the Church; he had none—none whatever. It was his vocation to be a gentleman, or what he esteemed such; and he had gone into orders as the shortest and readiest cut to the position. Of mean birth, but as a boy very beautiful and talented, he had found wealthy patrons; he had made his way through a public school and had gone to college with an exhibition. There, so far as scholarship went, he did well, but his conduct was not such as secures the confidence of friends. He had earned the reputation of being a slippery person. Brafferton was now his third curacy, and he was as far from preferment as ever. The sphere did not satisfy him; he felt his powers wasted there, he was ambitious of great things, but he was far too much in haste ever to achieve permanent success.

A mood of profound discouragement was upon him at the time when John Withers and his sister returned to Hurtleale. Rachel crossed his path, and a new road to honour opened before him. He cast his eyes on her with mixed motives. In the first place she

belonged to the class of old-fashioned gentle-folks with whom he was not, nor ever would be, cater-cousins; in the second, she had money—gossip had magnified it into quite a pretty fortune; and in the third, she was a gentle, pleasing person, young and fresh, in whom he should no doubt have skill to develop all wifely virtues. He thought about her often, and soon fancied himself well on the way to winning her favour. So he was unfortunately—Rachel's heart was caught betwixt pity and sympathy, and was ready for a surrender. He made a little sentimental pretence with himself and protested that he had fallen in love with her too—but it was that sort of falling which has an eye to ultimate safety. He had looked and implied a lover's "*trust me!*" but he had never uttered a word that Rachel could hold as a pledge that he was not fooling her. Fooling her; the wicked thought never entered her honest little head or caused her honest little heart a single pang! People might think and say of him what they liked, but for her part, she knew him to be an excellent, delightful, most misunderstood, and misplaced person—and when she said this she was in earnest.

People have such different ways of thinking and feeling! Rachel remembered when they left Hurdendale and John went to his curacy in Wales, how they

would have esteemed it one of the happiest events possible could he have had the office Mr. Gilsland now held ; but there never was a chance of such luck for him. The grey curate had possessed it in peace and thankfulness for nearly twenty years, and was a man of fifty before he got his parsonage in the Potteries.

After Mrs. Sara Grandage's party, by the by, it was circulated amongst the gossips that Kitty Anderside had reconsidered her decision, and was going to join Mr. Crofts in his new cure after all. She said to excuse herself—though indeed she needed no excuse—that they had worked together so long at Brafferton that she could not get on alone ; and so had come to the conclusion of going to help him where he was. Rachel heartily wished her well, though *she* too had her little stone to cast at Mr. Gilsland ; it was brought to her sensitive ears that Kitty had actually been heard to call him a “pragmatical puppy ;” but she could not quite believe it. “Pragmatical puppy,” did not sound like one of Kitty's gentle phrases—nevertheless, it was a fact that Kitty said it.

IX.

It is always a rather melancholy time out of doors when the dead leaves are rustling on the roads and rotting in the ditches ; but Rachel Withers enjoyed the long evenings with the curtains drawn and fire and lamp ablaze ; especially she enjoyed them when her brother had a friend staying in the house. When the real winter set in with frost and snow, they were rather too far out of the world for visiting much ; but sometimes Mr. Anderside came over for a night, and sometimes Mr. Gilsland, and a third face made a cheerful variety by their hearth. It did John good too—his sister was convinced of it, though he professed to like quite as well being alone ; which was, to say the least of it, inhospitable. But the fact was, he gave a world of thought just then to Katherine Warleigh, all the more thought perhaps that she did not keep her promise of writing. Six lines to tell Rachel why they had left the Hurtlemere House so suddenly was all she had received since they returned to Whinstane Tower.

That John should dream of her was natural enough, and Rachel would have been the last person in the world to complain of such preoccupation had

it not made him unsociable with other people. He positively *would* not ask Mr. Gilsland to stay one gloomy October afternoon, though Rachel was sure he expected an invitation, and went away disappointed ; and when she ventured to say it was hardly civil, he cut her quite short, declaring that he did not want Mr. Gilsland coming to the Rectory so often.

So often ! when it was, she did not know how long since his last call ! Ten days, said John, but she was sure it must be more. And for her part, she added with a little air of dignity, she liked guests about the house. It was not as if they were poor and could not afford to entertain them ; *then* she should not care. And with that she retired to her own room, and perhaps shed a few tears as she pictured to herself the handsome curate breasting his lonely way over the moors against the wind, through the six dreary miles that stretched between the churlish Rectory and his dull lodgings in Brafferton.

Another day about this period she had a brisk passage of words with Mrs. Sara Grandage on the same subject. Bittersweet took upon herself to ask her goddaughter what she *could* see in Mr. Gilsland.

"He has a long figure, a pretty face, and looks like Absalom," said she in her quizzing fashion. "Put him on lilac kid gloves and a diamond ring on

his finger, and give him a perfumed handkerchief to use at pathetic moments, and you have the very sweetest picture of a pet parson."

So truly ill-natured of her, Rachel retorted; as if he chose his own face or could help being handsome!

But that was just Bittersweet's way—when she conceived an antipathy to any person she could not acknowledge a single virtue or merit he had.

"What do I see in him? What does anybody see in anybody? What does he see in me, that he should always peer over a roomful with his short-sighted eyes until he discovers my place, when he makes straight for it as if there were nobody else present? And sometimes I wish he would not, for it is so marked—though you need not fancy I am ashamed of his attentions; for I am *very* far from *that*! I am not witty, or pretty, or in any way entertaining beyond other young women, yet apparently he prefers my society to theirs. And why should not I prefer his? I always do like people who show a liking for me, and I always shall!" cried Miss Defiance, with her head aloft.

Then she told her godmamma very irreverently that she was welcome to have her fancies and delusions like the rest of the world, but it was perfectly preposterous for her or anybody to accuse

Mr. Gilsland of having an eye to her little shred of a fortune.

"And it is uncivil to me, too," added she, indignantly; "for if I am no better than other girls, neither am I conspicuously worse. Why may I not be supposed to have some small attractions of my own, besides pounds, shillings, and pence?"

Bittersweet enjoyed her wrath and actually had the—what shall I call it?—the *abominableness* to say to her face:

"You are cut out for an old maid, Dumpling. Don't marry, and I'll leave you a nice little fortune; marry, and I'll cut you off with a shilling!"

To tell any girl at eighteen she is cut out for an old maid! If that is not sin, what is?

Oh, how Rachel fired up!

"How dare you say that, godmamma? And you married yourself!" cried she.

"So I did, but it is a long while ago, and I knew no better. I would not marry *now*, I assure you."

"You are an old woman, you are a hundred! And it is a shame of you to speak against marrying when all the world makes a proverb for goodness of your husband's name!"

"He was a very philosophical person."

"I should think he had need to be!" retorted

Mistress Rachel, with epigrammatic point. Bittersweet only laughed and the laugh brought her god-daughter back to good-humour. "Perhaps," said she more calmly, "I am rather formal and Dutch to look at, but I am not *all* starch! I am sure I could be very fond of somebody who was fond of me, and to elect myself one of St. Catherine's maids before I am twenty—*No*. You may promise me your nice little fortune ten years hence if you choose, but I'll make no treaty for it with you now! I would not if there were no Mr. Gilsland in the world! Not marry, indeed!" and the young woman went off as stately as Queen Elizabeth's ruff.

Independently of her own marrying or letting it alone, Rachel Withers thoroughly enjoyed a wedding. People might say what they liked about weddings being dull, melancholy and so forth, but she liked to see them; and when she was asked towards the end of October to hold the gloves at Kitty Anderside's, she was proud and delighted to accept the invitation.

She told Mrs. Sara Grandage afterwards that she could not imagine what made the women cry at weddings, and what they got into such a state of tremulous excitement for. "It is always a risk, they say tragically. *Risk!* it could not have been much of a risk for Kitty Anderside or Mr. Crofts who have

been friends and neighbours for twenty years; yet her kinsfolk wept as if she were going to be carried to execution instead of to a comfortable parsonage amongst the Potteries. I was glad to see she had more sense than to cry herself, and Mr. Crofts looked quite spruce and jubilant, only his clothes fitted so ill. Kitty wore pearl grey satin and a bonnet—a wreath and a veil would have been absurd at her age, you know—and very nice and pleasant she was, trying to make everybody feel as happy and as much at their ease as herself.”

John Withers and his sister went over to Brafferton the evening before the wedding when there was a family dinner-party, and a full gathering of friends out of the town afterwards. The entertainment was rather dull and whispery and Mr. Gilsland was not there. Rachel could not help thinking how much more lively and agreeable a good dance would have made everything—but dancing was quite tabooed in the Andersides’ circle.

They had a beautiful morning for the wedding, and the church was crowded; all the school-children forming double lines of rosy faces up the centre aisle. Nothing particular happened except that old Miss Briggs, who was second bridesmaid, was taken faint, and had to be led into the vestry by John; she said to

excuse herself that the ceremony was so *awful*. And it did sound very solemn even to Rachel when she heard it read in church. She wondered how people who make marriages of convenience could stand and listen to that service; she thought there ought to be something special for their occasions and quite different.

After breakfast the bride and bridegroom set off on their journey home to the Parsonage amongst the Potteries, and there was another gathering in the evening—including the curate—which was by many degrees more cheerful than that of the night before. People seemed to have got a weight off their spirits, and though conversation was still the sole amusement, they recovered their natural voices and ventured to use them without dread of being considered unfeeling—an inexpressible relief to the bridesmaids.

X.

One morning about midway the month of December a letter arrived at the rectory containing the much-talked-of invitation to Whinstane, which Rachel had given up as forgotten and done with two months ago. It was Grace Warleigh who wrote,

but Katherine added a postscript seconding her wishes very cordially.

"Can you come as soon as Christmas Day is turned and remain with us a fortnight?" she said. "Papa made no demur when we asked him this unusual favour; had we imagined he would consent so readily we should have begged for it long ere this."

John Withers kept his eyes on his sister with a wistful earnestness as she read these lines aloud, and said when she reached the end of them, "You will go, Rachel?" to which she answered, "Oh, yes, to be sure!" as if she quite enjoyed the idea; which she certainly did not, much as she liked their friends. But anything to please John; so her acceptance was written and despatched forthwith.

They had had a steady, dull time during the previous three weeks at the Rectory; for the winter had set in with terrible snow-storms, and kept everybody prisoners at home. A poor old hawker had been found one Sunday morning frozen to death in the narrow lane between Deepgyll and the Force, his pack under his head, and his body half buried in the drift. The roads were almost impassable except on horseback, and the fells were one vast dazzling blank of snow. There was another heavy fall on the day Grace Warleigh's letter came, which levelled the

churchyard graves, and wrapt them in beautiful new winding-sheets for Christmas. It did not appear very clear to Rachel how, under these circumstances, she was to get to Whinstane Tower, eighteen miles off; but John coolly said,

“Where there was a will there was a way,” and after that, of course, she knew she should go, even though she might have to fly through the air on a broomstick!

Rachel's own little affairs had made no particular progress since Kitty Anderside's wedding. She had only seen Mr. Gilsland once during the drear month of November, when she met him accidentally in a shop at Brafferton; he was very pleasant, as usual, but also, as usual, had a little grievance—he could not procure any fresh butter. Rachel wished he did not make so much ado about trifles—John would have eaten dry bread for a twelvemonth before he would have dreamt of complaining to Katherine Warleigh! However, she promised to speak to Robb's wife at the mill to send him some, though she knew it was very scarce, and not good at this season when the cows could get no grass. The winter bade fair to be one of more than common severity; the hollies were scarlet with berries even *then* for the frozen-out birds, which was always taken in Hurtleale as a sign

of hard weather that would continue late and long.

But that malicious old Bittersweet defeated Rachel's kindly efforts for the curate's creature-comforts; she saw her a day or two after her embassy to the miller's wife, and cried, mockingly, wagging her head, "I have disappointed Mr. Gilsland of his butter, Dumpling; I want every ounce dame Robb can make, and she dare not offend me by selling it elsewhere. I am delighted to teach him a lesson of self-denial, and I hope he may profit by it. Have you got a lock of his lovely hair yet? Good-by, my dear, and keep up your spirits!"

Since this, Rachel had not seen the curate either at home or abroad; but only two days before Christmas, John, returning from Brafferton towards dusk, called her into his study for a bit of serious conversation. He had been over to the Andersides', where he had met Mr. Gilsland, and they had had some talk together. "Some grave talk, Rachel, and about *you*," he told her, and then stopped short, looking not a little vexed. After a minute's pause, he asked, abruptly,—

"Do you really feel that you can care for that man, Rachel?"

Rachel did not answer him; she felt her colour

come and go, and something rising in her throat as if it would choke her. John was kind and considerate, but he was woefully disappointed; and there was a touch of impatience in his voice, as he said, without pushing her to a confession, "Then, I suppose, I must make him welcome here more frequently. I will not assume the responsibility of thwarting your fancy, but I wish it had been for anybody else!"

Rachel had been forced to see, almost from the beginning of their acquaintance, that her brother did not like Mr. Gilsland, and as he was not apt to take up unfounded prejudices, she now begged him to give her his reasons for it. He could not exactly state to her one. Mr. Gilsland's personal and professional character were fair, he allowed, and his means would, doubtless, improve; his connections were unknown, but then a man is himself, and not his family. No, he did not object to him on the score of his birth, though he should have preferred seeing his sister marry a gentleman of condition equal to her own, but he was afraid his temper was *queer*!

"All our tempers are queer sometimes," rejoined Rachel, and the effort of speaking brought back her self-possession.

Finally, John said Mr. Gilsland had appealed to him, as his sister's natural guardian, to permit his visits at the Rectory, and that he did not feel he had a right to forbid them if they were agreeable to her. "We have always thought you a little woman of sense," added he, more cheerfully, perceiving that poor Rachel was a little cast down by his opinion of her lover, "and if you do not approve of him on closer acquaintance, you can depute me to tell him so. There need be no engagement yet, understand that distinctly: you must know each other better first. He will have no opportunity of seeing you before you go to Whinstane, so think the matter over while you are there, and if you return home in your present frame of mind, then he shall have leave to come."

If her brother had appeared in the least degree pleased with her prospects, Rachel would have been proud and happy beyond measure; but, as it was, she felt fretted with a host of uncomfortable fears. Still, atop of them all, there sang in her heart, ever and anon, that rejoicing cry, "He loves me! I knew he did, I knew he did!" which drowns every other voice when it gets an utterance. John might be grave, and Bittersweet might be sarcastic, but they could only ruffle her on the

surface while she had that balm of comfort within.

And as soon as Christmas Day and the school-feast were over, Rachel packed up her traps, left John to the tender mercies of Mary Deane and Phemie, who promised to take good care of him in her absence, and departed to Whinstane in the jingling Brafferton chaise, and in a most enviable mood of mind. She had received her first letter from Mr. Gilsland, and had answered it with joyous sincerity, and also she had received a letter from Bittersweet, whom John had apprised of the crisis in his sister's affairs. In this letter, Rachel was apostrophized as "a bewitched duckling, ready to run straight into reynard's mouth, with a quack of tragical glee, directly he opened it!" and informed that her godmamma only waited her decision to send for her lawyer to alter her will.

The young woman consulted her dignity, and said she *might wait*.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

AT WHINSTANE TOWER.

None serve him but constrained things whose hearts are absent.

SHAKESPEARE.

I.

RACHEL WITHERS could hardly believe that it was real; she felt as if at any moment she might have woken up out of her dream, and have found herself back at the homely, comfortable rectory. But, no, she was verily at Whinstane Tower. Katherine Warleigh was in the adjoining room, probably fast asleep, and the drowing of Lady Foulis's organ drifted with the sobs of the night gusts eerily round about the walls. From the fulness of the sound, Rachel knew that she must be playing with her window wide, even at that hour and in that bitter frost. Was the woman insensible to cold, or were these midnight misereres to the winds of heaven parts of an unfinished penance?

Rachel had passed by the foot of her private

staircase that day, and had seen her servant coming down—a dumb, old, faithful-looking soul, who was, perhaps, the only soul alive, besides herself, who knew the core of her mystery. Even Sir William Warleigh had no distinct understanding of it. She had come back to Whinstane, after a year or two's absence, just about the time when he was brought thither, and had begun living then precisely as she was living now, only she was young at that date, and at this she was old. The dales' world gossiped about her awfully long ago, but, when it had said its say, seeing her no more, forgot her; the new generation rarely heard her name, or heard it only as the echo of an unintelligible tragedy.

Katherine and Grace Warleigh, familiar with the idea of her ever since they were born, had neither interest nor curiosity on the matter. At very long intervals, when they were children, Lady Foulis sent for them, and they went reluctantly. She had possession of the easternmost turret for her life, and, on a stated day of the year, Sir William saw her to pay her her income, which was charged on the Penslaven lands. She was not mad, the girls assured Rachel, whatever else she might be; and Katherine said she was certainly one of the old race—a genuine Warleigh, born and bred; for she

had the noble features, the full lips, and the resplendent dark eyes that gleamed from many a stately canvas in the picture-gallery. She was a papist, and Grace's pet theory concerning her was that she had been a nun, and had fled her convent with some lover—loved not wisely, but too well—and that being overtaken by swift remorse for her broken vows, she had thenceforth given herself up to a voluntary imprisonment. This speculation was as near the truth—and as far from it—as many another that hovered round the mystery of her name.

The life at Whinstane was, indeed, a life of weariful stagnation—Rachel Withers could not have endured it very long. They went down in the morning to a surly breakfast in the grey twilight—for Sir William kept the earliest hours, and allowed no voice but his own to be heard as he read his paper. They munched their toast in silence, and made signals for sugar, or butter, or bacon with the most stealthy carefulness, and if, in their transit to and fro the table, any vessel clinked against another, his scowl was almost as savage as a blow. Yet Grace declared he was quite in a genial mood for him since the news had come that Oliver's wife had brought him a little son; perhaps the good

effect of it was wearing off now, however; for it was a month old when Rachel arrived at the Tower; and he had begun to be desperately impatient to hear from Laurence, in answer to a most magnanimous proposal that he considered he had made him; and his vexation each morning when the post-bag yielded up nothing but the daily paper, was very apparent.

After breakfast was over, the young women wandered into the wilderness of a library, and cowered round the fire within the screen, talking in whispers—nobody at Whinstane seemed to dare to speak in a natural tone except Sir William, and Rachel was fast catching the timid habit. There they monotonized until nearly noon, when they went into the park, and marched up and down a path that had been swept for them in the snow. The first morning they walked as far as the rectory, and saw Mrs. Hill for ten minutes—an event which had brightened Grace ever since. She read a letter from Arthur, and communicated a message to his mother for reply, and with this crumb of comfort was refreshed beyond belief. Rachel wrote to John afterwards, and Katherine looked over her shoulder for a minute or two while she was doing so, but she sent no message to him; perhaps she was too shy,

his sister thought, and then wondered whether she really liked him; they were not long enough together for any very profound attachment to be formed—if a reasonable affection be an affair of time; but she believed sincerely that only opportunity lacked to accomplish in Katherine's mind what was already past changing in John's.

Luncheon made an incident in the middle of the day. Sir William always presented himself at the table if he were about the house, and questioned his daughters straightly as to where they had been and what they had done since breakfast, invariably sneering and growling over the summary. They were not allowed to interfere in the village school, or to share any part of Mrs. Hill's parish work. There was not one kind duty or office towards their poorer neighbours in which they might engage. No Christmas bounties were dispensed from the Tower as from other great houses, and so cruelly strict was Sir William's rule that never a cottager of all his labouring tenants would have dared to gather a fagot of broken sticks to warm his frozen hearth. There was no hunting just now because of the hard weather, but when the meet was anywhere in the neighbourhood, the girls were forbidden to stir beyond the flower-gardens. If Sir William had been

the tenderest father in the world he could not have testified more care over their every movement than he did ; but his watchfulness arose from his habits of mean suspicion, not out of an anxious natural affection, and it was irksome accordingly.

The afternoon was always inexpressibly long and slow. The wintry sky looked too heavy, dreary, and cloud-laden to tempt any one forth a second time in the day, and when luncheon was over, the girls betook themselves to the library again, and crooned through the old stories till it was dark. All the witch legends, ghost tales, and secret family traditions of the dales had found a storehouse in Katherine's brain, and she delighted in airing her musty possessions. This weird chat lasted them until dinner which was as silent and cheerless a meal as breakfast. After that they saw Sir William no more, and what became of him Rachel did not care to inquire. They retreated to the screened library hearth and the eerie phantom talk ; and at ten o'clock ' they were supposed to go to their rooms, and they did go ; and there Rachel shivered and wrote down in her little locked diary the no-events of the day until the pen dropt from her stiffened fingers ; for a fire was not allowed to her in her chamber, and her friends were stinted to an inch of candle. Their maid was

a perfectly respectful, disagreeable spy of a woman, who executed Sir William's will as sternly as a jailer.

Oh, any way of escape from such a life would be a change for the better! Rachel Withers would rather have been the humblest working-woman in the world, free to come and go, to speak and breathe, than either of these two imprisoned creatures. They did not look so handsome as when they were in Hurtledale, and enjoyed an occasional outlet for themselves. Their features were drawn and set querulously, their eyes were scared, plaintive, anxious, watchful. Surely the despotism of a household tyrant is the chief curse women can have to groan under! All of cruelty that rumour attributed to Sir William Warleigh fell short of what Rachel saw his daughters daily endure. Filial obedience to such a man could be no longer a duty; Laurence had broken from his yoke, Oliver diplomatically evaded it, and the sooner Katherine and Grace found deliverance from his mastership the happier for all of them! With his leave or without his leave, Rachel hoped and trusted that when the day came that Arthur Hill and her brother John could give them good homes and kind protection, they would go without scruple or hesitation to the care

of those who loved them, and who would make their lives worth living. And this doctrine she preached as well as believed; perhaps, if Sir William had been aware of it he would not have made her the welcome guest she was.

II.

Laurence Warleigh was married—the news reached Whinstane Tower on the morning of New Year's Day.

Sir William had just sworn at Katherine and dragged the breakfast-table aslant towards the fire when Nichols, the butler, brought in the post-bag. His master snatched it roughly out of the man's hands, and flung it upon the rug, where Grace was kneeling to warm her thin shivering person; bidding her open it and give him his *Times*, and look if there were any letter from Laurence. Meanwhile he applied himself to the strong ale and game-pie with which he was accustomed to lay the foundation of his ogre's breakfast; and when his son's missive was timidly handed to him, he only laid down his knife and fork to break the seal and flatten the sheet of paper open on the table, and then resumed his weapons that he might satisfy his hunger and his curiosity at one and the

same time. His daughters watched his countenance furtively as he read, and saw it change from its animal coarseness and quiescence to a purple and bloated rage. When he opened his mouth, it was to stutter out a volley of frightful oaths which made the young women quail and avert their heads; and having read the document to an end, he tore it furiously in two, flung it towards the fire, and leaving his meal unfinished, dashed out of the room.

Rachel Withers held herself aloof while his daughters brought their pale, terrified faces together, and speculated in whispers on what Laurence's new offence could be; but not until they saw their father galloping down the avenue at the top of his horse's speed, did they venture to take up the fragments of their brother's letter, and read it. Katherine sighed as she perused the scant lines, and said the letter had given Laurence some trouble to write, and was not very conciliatory in tone. How could it be conciliatory? pleaded Grace, and then they talked low and hopelessly on the further estrangement that was sure to ensue; the younger sister wishing that Oliver were at home to prevent it, and the elder professing to believe that his interference would do more harm than good.

Considering the importance of the intelligence that

Laurence Warleigh's letter conveyed, it was very cool, brief and explicit; but considering also the terms on which he stood with his father it was as respectful as such unwelcome news could possibly be. The young man began by saying that the subject of his epistle would surprise, and perhaps displease, Sir William, but as concealment would now be equally wrong and futile he had written to apprise him of his marriage with a young and lovely woman, the orphan and only daughter of Captain Gwynne, a naval officer, who had died in her childhood, bequeathing her to the care of his mother, the only near relative she had. She was a Roman Catholic, but a sincere, pious, good girl as ever breathed; without fortune, but of simple tastes and habits. He wound up by mentioning that for the present they proposed making their home at the Hurtlemere House, and by expressing a hope that his sisters would be permitted to visit them there. And that was all—he acknowledged no breach of authority, and seemed quite unconscious of any pardon being needed for what he had done.

“Think of the Hurtlemere House in winter,” whispered Grace, drawing her breath with a shudder through her closed teeth; “that great pine wood at the back, and nothing but the tarn and snowy fells to look out upon. They ought to be very much in

love to support that intolerable dreariness—I hope they are!”

“I wish Laurence had not married in a corner as if he were ashamed of his choice,” said Katherine.

“Poor fellow!” sighed Grace; “he was so persecuted—home was made so miserable to him.”

“Not more miserable than to us,” responded her sister; and then they fell into a dreary silence, and stood looking out at the skeleton trees of the avenue and the snow-buried undulations of the park, where had reigned for nearly a month past as black a frost as any within the memory of Whinstandale.

Sir William returned home at noon, his rage cowed down, but full of a malignant disappointment and an implacable spite. From the wrathful ejaculations that frothed over while he sat with his daughters and guest at luncheon they gathered that he had been to his agent to try what he could do to punish his offending son, and that he had come back with the mortifying assurance that he could do nothing. Afterwards he bade Katherine write to her brother Oliver, and command his immediate presence at Whinstane.

“A black beginning this for the New Year,” thought poor Rachel, whose luck had set her in the midst of this dismal episode. “Oh, how thankful

shall I be when my visit is over, and I return to the peace and kindly comforts of home!"

The same afternoon about four o'clock, while Katherine and she were prosing over the family event by the library fire, Grace came running in to say that Lady Foulis had sent for them and they must go immediately. The sisters disappeared and Rachel was left alone—not for many minutes however; for Katherine came back almost at once to tell her that she was wanted too. Lady Foulis would like to see the guest Sir William did not distrust, was the explanation of this unexpected summons, and she obeyed it with awakened curiosity.

The apartments occupied by Lady Foulis lay all together in the north-eastern wing of the Tower. They were approached by a separate staircase, and the door by which they formerly communicated with the great corridor had been walled up. Katherine bade Rachel take heed to her steps as they began to mount the spiral stair; for it was steep and gloomy, and when they reached the top both were glad to pause and take breath. Opposite to them was a door standing ajar, through which shone the light of a lamp, and when they had waited a moment, the staid-visaged woman whom Rachel had seen once before looked out and bade them enter.

It would not be easy to say what Rachel expected to behold, but assuredly it was not what she saw. Visions of sorceresses grey and terrible, of witches wild and weird, of remorse-stricken penitents worn and wasted in living death, had flitted momentarily before her imagination as she climbed the turret steps; but when the servant opened an inner door, a rush of warm, incense-perfumed air passed over her, and she was ushered into a pretty octagon-shaped room, half darkened by the crimson drapery of five narrow high windows, and half lighted by the ruddy gleam of fir-logs ablaze on the hearth. Her first impression was as of a solemn, glowing picture.

"This is our friend, Rachel Withers," said Grace, coming forward, and taking her hand to lead her to Lady Foulis, who sat erect in a high-backed chair at one corner of the fireside. Each gave the other a direct glance full of inquiry, and then in obedience to a sign from Katherine Rachel sat down by her on a bench of oak which Grace had previously drawn towards the hearth for her own accommodation.

What Lady Foulis saw in Rachel Withers matters little here; what Rachel saw in her was a woman tall, straight, and stately; a woman verging on seventy or past it, with silver-white hair crisped up in some bygone fashion, and covered with a kerchief

of black lace tied loosely over it. All her dress was of fine black cloth, flowing and graceful; her hands were long, lean and fair, and her face was like many another face in the gallery of portraits, only more aged perhaps than any of those Warleigh beauties were when they committed their charms to the verdict of posterity—that is to say, her face was like theirs in feature; the curve of the lips, though fallen, was as full; the eyes, though marred by time, were as large and as beautifully cut; but in the expression of her countenance there was something very peculiar and not pleasing. Rachel had heard tell of the second-sight—she could have fancied that Lady Foulis had that weird gift.

There was nothing supernatural in her surroundings now, however,—nothing but what contributed to the general air of comfort and convenience. Behind her chair was a curtain drawn back from a tiny oratory in a recess of the wall, graced and decked in the common way. The organ, by means of which she disturbed Rachel's nightly rest, occupied a corresponding position behind the bench on which she was seated with Katherine and Grace. A thick crimson carpet covered the middle of the stone floor, and in the centre of it was a table garnished with books and works like that of any

other gentlewoman. What the books were, Rachel did not see; Katherine suggested afterwards books of necromancy, and Grace books of devotion; perhaps they were both or neither, or only books of general reading—they looked like it—and Lady Foulis had occasional parcels from the outside world which perhaps contained them. She had letters too, notwithstanding that she was a witch; in fact, to keep up the ghostly shimmer of a mystery we must not inspect it too closely. Before Rachel Withers had been in her presence five minutes she began to think her a person quite capable of being explained; the agreeable feeling was not permanent, but during its continuance it enabled her to collect her faculties, and steady her nerves for what might be to come.

“I revolved just long enough on the wheel of fashion to have all the sentiment ground out of me,” were the first distinct words she heard Lady Foulis utter. She was speaking to Grace when Katherine and she entered, and at that sentence interrupted herself to receive them. Rachel hoped that when they were settled she would resume what sounded like a reminiscence of her early life, but she did not; she began on quite another subject, on that which was occupying the minds of the whole household—on Laurence's marriage.

“Laurence Warleigh has taken to himself a wife, and Whinstandale has lighted no bonfires and rung no bells,” said she. “It used not to be so in the old time. We have a legend amongst us that says, ‘Bride unwelcomed, babe unblest.’ And Oliver is to come home and be king, is he, velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws?” Katherine replied that she had written to him that day by her father’s orders. “And his ugly wife and their boy—father and son, they will both stand in better folks’ shoon than their own,” added Lady Foulis, sneering with a tremulous, withered lip.

“How do you know that Oliver’s wife is ugly?” asked Grace. “We have none of us seen her.”

“Did he not marry her for money?” was the answer. “But Laurence’s bride is a beauty—he always had an eye for a sweet fair face, and he married her for love.”

“He was sure never to marry for anything lower or less,” murmured Katherine.

While this conversation was passing, though Rachel did not look at Lady Foulis, and felt indeed strangely restrained from doing so, she was conscious of the dark eyes intently watching her, and was at length startled by her saying with a quaint abruptness: “*You* are making the best of the time present, *you* are content and happy now?” to which she

answered, "Yes," promptly enough, though the red flew into her face and her pulse redoubled its speed. "That is wise—the future is always unsure," rejoined Lady Foulis, and then addressing Katherine and Grace she said; "*You*, poor things, are having your worst days here—your bright ones will happen elsewhere!"

"We have need to long for them," sighed Katherine. "If they don't make haste we shall be past enjoying them."

"Have patience yet; they may not be so far off as they seem."

All these words of Lady Foulis might be regarded either as gravely prophetic or as simple common-places, whichever her hearers liked; but it was good-by to Rachel Withers' composure; she fell sombre and silent, and was physically chilled as if a cold shadow enveloped her. Her two friends talked on; told Lady Foulis whom they had seen in Hurdledale, and what delightful hours they had spent at the rectory; and she listened, and put in little phrases in quite a matter-of-fact way. All the time this was transacting, Rachel felt or fancied in some inexplicable manner that the weird woman's thoughts were bent upon herself; very foolish she knew it was, but she could not help it; all her nerves were

strung up and in a state of high excitement: the imagination plays our judgment strange tricks.

Lady Foulis did not detain her visitors very long, and when she intimated their dismissal, she rose and touched Rachel on the cheek, saying that it was a lifetime ago since she had seen anything so round or so rosy; Rachel's skin crisped and shivered at her as one shivers at a wicked story, and she was thankful to get away again, even to the dreary library; but it was ever so long before the ice of that caress was melted out of her warm veins.

Katherine could not forbear smiling. "You will go away and confirm Lady Foulis's reputation as a witch," said she.

Rachel shuddered irrepressibly and replied that, speaking in dales' parlance, she certainly was not *canny*.

"No," agreed Grace. "She has a remarkable influence. Wherever she draws it from or whatever purpose she puts it to, she has an influence beyond the ordinary power of women. I believe in witchcraft—the Bible admits it, you know."

"I should like to be sure whether she has really any foreknowledge of events, or whether she merely casts out her oracular speeches by way of cheering us," Katherine murmured, reflectively.

"She has always promised us some good ultimately," said Grace; "and whether her promises come true or not I am glad to dream over them while we have so little that is pleasant present with us."

Rachel said she had no faith in prognostics, and Katherine said neither had she—she wished she had—and then they entered on a discussion thereof, tending to the conclusion that they were all weaker than they were willing to admit. They agreed that warnings of a spiritual nature were perfectly ridiculous and impossible; but something within them deeper than reason silently protested against their loudest assertions. Their brains denied, but their nerves confessed to the influence of mysteries beyond the reach of their philosophy to explain.

"I don't believe in ghosts, yet am I mortally afraid of them," shuddered Rachel, with a sensation as of cold water running down her back. "Lady Foulis's kiss was like a frost-blight—and what did she mean about the future being unsure?" Katherine advised her not to worry herself with speculating on any dark sayings, and fortunately she was not of the temper that inclines to do it.

"As soon as I see the smoke of our blessed Hurtledale chimneys, I shall be as blithe as a bee

once more," said she, rallying her courage; "but here I could positively learn to mope and be miserable if I slept, or did not sleep rather, within sound of that solemn organ—listen to the dirge, it is moaning and sobbing through now. Oh, Katie, oh, Grace, I hope it won't be long before some true knight comes riding this way to carry you off from your haunted castle!"

Her friends laughed and asked why her wits ran so much on weddings—was it Laurence's had set them a-gee? She said no, and somehow it came to pass during the next hour, that the ghost-talk retired outside the screen, and within it Rachel told them her little love story. True was the sympathy and tender—but *how, why* had she kept the beautiful secret from them *so long*? She had been with them four whole days!

III.

Swiftly obedient to his father's summons, on the third of January Oliver Warleigh arrived at the Tower; and terms for his permanent establishment there were soon made between them. Katherine was very angry. She felt that Laurence would not be forgiven now, and that they should be more

widely separated than ever. It would be Oliver's interest to keep him away from Whinstane, and what was Oliver's interest nobody expected him to neglect. Be that as it might, however, by the arrangements Sir William agreed to with his younger son, his daughters' lives could hardly fail to be changed for the better. With a sister-in-law living at the Tower they must acquire a certain measure of liberty and society. Oliver stipulated for the occupancy of the whole of the west wing, for his separate table, servants, horses, and carriage, all at Sir William's expense, and his demands were granted without demur.

Laurence would thus be kept out of his rightful place, and it might be for a long, long term of years—no one could foresee the end of it. Grace thought that Oliver would never lend himself to hinder a reconciliation when the freshness of the offence wore off his father's mind; but Katherine declared she would not trust him unless it could be managed with advantage to himself. Rachel Withers, being placed in the midst of these changes, heard, if she did not share in, the sisters' debates. Oliver, after the momentary surprise of finding any lady at Whinstane as a guest, was very gracious to her; but he impressed her no more favourably now than formerly.

It was singular how he could be so polished and even fine-looking a man, and yet have such a strange likeness to Sir William. He asked her twenty questions about John and about their return to Hurtledale, and was pleased to say that as she had made the good beginning of coming to the Tower as a visitor, so he hoped to see her there again and that frequently. Rachel's answer was courteous, but there were mental reservations behind it—of her own free will she would never see the dreadful place again!

Her fortnight was now drawing to an end, and glad would she be to go home—there was no place like it that she had found yet! Mr. Gilsland was there—that is, he was in Hurtledale. She had thought about him incessantly since she came to Whinstane, and the conclusion of her thinkings was that she really loved him, let his faults in other people's eyes be what they might. Mrs. Sara Grandage had written to her again in her serious sarcastic vein, but it did not alter her sentiments a bit; of course, she felt with regret that nobody agreed with her in them, but she consoled herself with the reflection that hers was probably not a singular case.

On her last night at the Tower, to the general surprise, Lady Foulis sent for her again, and sent

for her alone. Katherine averred that she was not mad and never had been, but on this occasion Rachel certainly was relieved to find that the sober attendant remained in the room as long as she stayed. Her talk was very wild and incoherent, and while Rachel sat nervously regarding her a strange idea shot into her mind—Lady Foulis had a look of Sir William and she had a look of Oliver; a rare expression came into her face which at odd moments struck out into a likeness and vanished; some trick of feature—of lip or eye it must have been; for when she sought it, it was not there, and no sooner had she said to herself “Again!” than it was gone. She told Rachel in a dreamy, involved sentence which it was not easy to understand, that she was to be mixed up in some mysterious fashion with the fortunes and misfortunes of the Warleights of Whinstandale. At present her destiny seemed to run clear of theirs, and likely to run clear for ever and a day, but she hoped the weird woman’s prediction meant good-luck to John in his wooing of Katherine. But the Sibyl, if Sibyl she were, was not in her inspired mood that night, she neither fired nor froze her listener, who went away from her presence simply wondering how and why it had made her so uncomfortable before.

“All my own exalted imagination, I suppose, wrought up to expect witcheries and beguilements,” soliloquized she. “A little more preparation, and I might perhaps see ghosts, then hear them speak, and believe them to be actual visitants from another world! It is just as well that I am going away before my fancy has time to get a wry twist. I would not for anything become a mystical, visionary, phantomizing body such as this old house might make of a stronger mind than mine after a course of its dullness, dreariness, and monotony. I have not had one real good night’s rest since I came; but to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow I go home, and that comforting thought will rock me asleep, in spite of Lady Foulis and her weariful organ!”

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE OLD HURTLEMERE HOUSE.

All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses.

LONGFELLOW.

I.

THE old Hurtlemere House was not a gay bower for a bride in the frozen days of mid-winter, but Laurence Warleigh would have now no other choice of a home. Rachel Withers walked up there the day after her return home, as Grace had entreated her, to see what manner of preparation Mistress Dobie had made for the coming of her young master and his bride. She had done her best, but Rachel thought the house looked more solitary, grey, and weather-beaten, more haunted, cold, and ghostly than ever house looked before. The topmost slope of the fell rose abruptly behind it, clad from base to brow with dusky fir-woods; in front lay the tarn, fed by a thousand trickling rills from

the moors, while round and about swept the purple lines of the mountains, like stern barriers to fence out the world. In the season of flowers and sunshine it had some of the sweetest charms of solitude, but any place more wild or desolate in the dead time of the year it would have been difficult to find, even in these lonely dales of the bleak north-west. The lake was crisped over with ice, and a long, lamentable blast went moaning and wailing through the trees like the very voice of despairing anguish. Every sight, every sound gave her a presentiment of sorrow. Let those laugh at presentiments who could, but she never dared!

And on the ensuing day happened such a mischance! They were really grieved, John Withers and his sister, though it was not a very momentous thing to be grieved about, perhaps. They had arranged that Hurtleale church bells, at least, should ring Laurence Warleigh and his bride a peal of welcome at their coming home, but they did not arrive in the afternoon when they were looked for, and as it grew dark, Kester Greaves, tired of waiting in the cold, went away to his comfortable fireside, and forgot all about them. The next morning they heard at the rectory that the young couple had arrived last night.

Of course, plentiful details were circulating about the event already; one wonders how such details fly abroad; but Mistress Dobie dearly loved a gossip, and had sympathetic cronies enough to help her talk. Mrs. Sara Grandage was mightily interested to hear the earliest report of the bride; and from one source or another she gleaned the fullest and most circumstantial particulars of everything that had happened at the Hurtlemere House; and when she had got them well in hand she drove over to luncheon at the rectory for the special purpose of telling Rachel all "how and about it," as she said; and Rachel was quite as glad to listen as Bittersweet to narrate.

It was nightfall when the young people reached their destination, having had twice to vary their route to avoid the heavy snow-drifts that blocked up the hollows of the hills. They brought with them a south-country girl as maid, who cried for the last six miles at the sight of the dreary moors, for which she had exchanged the sunny slopes of Surrey. The bride's spirits, on the contrary, rose buoyantly with every difficulty and discomfort, and when the ramshackle post-chaise, in which they had travelled from Brafferton, rolled in at the gates, she laughed and said it had been quite a merry, adventurous coming-home!

Mathew Dobie and his wife, spruced up in their Sunday best, received the young squire and his bride at the door; he, with his short grunt meant to be expressive of welcome; she, with smiles, curtsies, and diffusive apologies for the bitter weather, the time of night, and every other unavoidable incident attending their arrival; and then ushered them into the east parlour, where all possible preparations had been made for their reception. A fire of pine-knots flashed in the wide range, and a round table spread for dinner stood opposite the hearth, with chairs drawn up on either side. Big bushes of holly, twinkling with red, ripe berries, were stuck above the chimney, and the spoils of the chase, which were the appropriate decorations of Moor Murray's house, had been re-arranged on the wainscoted walls with a careful eye to their effect.

The bride expressed herself as charmed with the picturesque novelty of all she saw: "It is so quaint and cosy, Laurence, I like the look of it," said she. "It has the air of the best room at a country inn, such as heroes stop at in romances!"

Then Laurence glanced round at the ruddy, winterly scene, and paid Mistress Dobie a compliment on her skill in educing comfort out of such

poor means as lay at her disposal, and immediately settled himself in the unwieldy chair opposite to that in which his wife had already ensconced herself to enjoy the genial shine of the fire. She loosed her travelling cloak and hood as she sat there, and put them off; and when all her golden hair fell down upon her neck, and caught the glinting rays about her cheeks, that blushed like roses from the frosty air, worthy Mistress Dobie, used to hard and homely outlines, pronounced her, with enthusiasm, a real beauty, "fair as a flower and sweet as spice!"

Thus far, all had gone delightfully. Laurence laughed, and the bonnie bride turned to her with some merry words of thanks, but, as she spoke, there came over the silly old woman's face a look of woeful dismay, and abruptly exclaiming that she must see about that slow lass, Magsie, or dinner would be spoilt, she hurried from the room and returned to the kitchen with all the wholesome colour bleached out of her broad cheeks. Her husband was there, and blameless scapegoat Magsie, roasting herself as well as the game, and Lucy, the poor maid, who had sunk down on the settle in the chimney-nook, and sat wearing a countenance of ineffable discontent and disgust.

Mistress Dobie entered the kitchen wringing her

hands and betraying other signs of extreme distress, and when Mathew demanded what ailed the woman—was she gone daft all at once? she answered him in a gust of sobs, “I’ve gotten a shock, Mathew, I’ve gotten a shock! Why has Master Laurence brought that pretty cretur to this lonesome wilderness, so far fra her ain country an her ain kin? Is it likelings she’ll prosper here—a wee bit delicate bud up ov’ our bleak moors? If he don’t carry her awa’, an’ that soon, worse’ll come of it.”

Mathew looked provoked, and took his pipe out of his mouth, to bid her hold her foolish tongue, and then replaced it, and puffed away with serene philosophy; but Lucy, whose eyes still brimmed with tears, began to whimper, and say it did seem a terrible lonesome spot to live in—nothing but snow, water, and woods shut up amongst mountains.

“It is a dowly, dowly spot, that it is,” agreed Mistress Dobie, with a glance that sparkled defiance of Mathew, and a tongue that would not be stayed. “We can’t see t’ reek fra’ a neebor’s chimley t’ year in an’ t’ year out—for neebors there’s none; an’ only when t’ wind sets fair can we hear t’ jow o’ t’ church bells. We might be dwelling in a heathen land. I hardlings know how I’ve bidden to live here

going along o' thirty year, an' me a Christian body that allus enjoyed my privileges afore."

"Thou's bidden to live here, Dolly, woman, acause I'se lived here, an' acause it's been thy dooty," said her husband, with sententious gravity. "An' now let's ha' no more prate nor clack, but show this lass to her missis's chaumer, for they'll be wanting to rightle thersels afore dinner, pretty folks allus does. Come, bustle, woman, bustle; t' grass'll grow under thy feet, an' this bod'll be ower done, backen an' baste as Magsie will, if there's much langer to wait."

Thus peremptorily admonished, Mistress Dobie led Lucy up the great draughty staircase, and having made her acquainted with the geography of her own and her mistress's rooms, she left her there and went down again to the kitchen, still wearing her troubled air of mystery. Having shut the door, and spied round furtively to make sure that there was nobody within hearing but her husband and Magsie, she drew near to Mathew, who was refilling his pipe, and caused him to suspend the operation of lighting it by uplifting a solemn forefinger, and saying, in a voice of compassionate awe,—

"She's doomed, Mathew, she's *doomed*, that bonnie, bonnie thing! Don't thou sneer. She was smiling

wi' her innicent lips, an' speaking to me so soft an' sweet, when I see all at once them *white hands* wavering aboon her head, like as if they was blessing her. Thou might ha' knocked me down wi' a feather, I was so fleyed. An' thou knaws what it means, Mathew ; I see 'em, I tell thee, I see 'em wi' my two eyes as plain as I see Magsie now !”

“ Out, woman, out ! can she see wi' her ten toes ? What suld I heed o' ghostises an' white hands ? A blessing'll harm her none, come it fra' sperrit or come it fra' flesh. Don't let on wi' no such stuff to yon bit o' a lass upstairs : she's a faint-hearted body fra t' mak on her, an' wad be for warning her lady, till, among ye, ye'd scare her into t' churchyard. T' folly o' womanfolk is fairly enew to drive a sensy man daft, an' t' aulder they grows, t' sillier they gets—that's *my* exper'ence.”

With this shrewd remark, felt to be exhaustive of the subject, Mathew restored his pipe to his mouth and held his peace ; while Magsie, who had listened open-mouthed and bewildered, let the bird on the spit burn—a catastrophe that appealed so forcibly to Mistress Dobie's nose and temper that she promptly discharged her from her neglected duty, and superintended the roast herself with a careful querulousness that left her no further leisure for her phantom

fears until the dinner was duly served, and Master Laurence and his fair young wife were shut up in the old parlour to make the best of it.

Later in the evening she was summoned to answer a question—Were the outer wooden shutters made fast over the windows? Laurence said his wife shivered, and felt an icy blast blowing upon her head wherever she sat. Yes, the shutters were all made fast, but the house was full of draughts, Mistress Dobie told them, and then added; "It's a bitter black frost, Master Laurence, an' a nor-east wind to-night; an' when that's t' case, there's gusts i' this room to rive t' very hair off of ane's head. It don't become me to advise, but I suld say this is hardlings the spot for a delicate south-bred lady."

"But a nor-east wind does not happen every night," said the bride; to which Mistress Dobie responded, "It mostlings does. Hurtledale's a rare place for cold weather. I says sometimes when Winter leaves other folks he comes up here an' stays wi' us, until we're fain indeed to see his back when he does go—and go he doesn't most years, not for good, till into May, an' he allus shows us his blue neb again quite t' fore end o' October."

The young wife only laughed at this and rejoined that they would try to make him warm and wel-

come; and when Mistress Dobie went back to Mathew in the kitchen she proclaimed that Master Laurence's wife was the lady to draw sunbeams out of cucumbers, and that whether the White Hands meant mischief or not, her life, while it lasted, was sure to be a happy one.

John Withers was not present when Bittersweet detailed her story — detailed it at much greater length than is recorded here, making it sound extremely like the initial chapter of a romance; so that Rachel had the pleasure of repeating it to him, which she did in spite of numerous impatient ejaculations and a final verdict that “Mistress Dobie was a superstitious old goose, and ought to have her tongue tied if she had no discretion in the use of it”—a rather strong remark for the rector.

“It is very strange, but people always have believed in the legend of the White Hands that haunt the old Hurtemere House,” said Rachel. “Katherine Warleigh was talking to me about it one afternoon at Whinstane, and she would have been quite annoyed had I expressed a doubt of its truth.”

John here actually went the length of saying that he thought Katherine had more sense!

“Old families are as tenacious of their ghost-

stories as of their personal honour," persisted Rachel, who wanted to go on talking; but John took down a big book from its shelf, buried his studious pate in it, and turned a deaf ear to her little subsequent remarks, thus intimating to her that the present was a time to be silent.

Rachel felt rather cross—John really sometimes treated her quite like a child; and to restore herself to a sense of ease and dignity, she went immediately to her desk and wrote Mr. Gilsland a letter—he never wearied of her chat, either in person or on paper. They were new lovers, and oh! how delightful it was!

II.

Rachel Withers did not hear from Whinstane, though she wrote twice before the month was out, and both John and she then began to think that all correspondence with Hurtleddale would be interdicted; Sir William Warleigh might suspect his daughters of opening a secret channel of communication with their offending brother through her if they were allowed to exchange letters.

During the interim they had seen the bride twice, and were agreed that Laurence Warleigh had

as fair an excuse for an imprudent marriage as ever man possessed. Her name was Helena—Nell, he called her. She was a bright beauty, very happy and sprightly looking, with dark blue eyes, abundant golden brown hair, delicate features, and the sweetest little mouth in the world—such a contrast to Laurence, who was a big, massive fellow, burnt almost to an umber shade. His complexion *coloured* well, he observed to John Withers, who was struck by his Indian tint; and then he told him that it was thus enriched during a couple of years to and fro the wild savannahs of America. He had been a great traveller during his absence from the dales, and was as pleasant and frank a companion as any one could desire; he always had a fine temper, and his wandering life and various hardships had not spoilt but mellowed it.

John Withers and Laurence Warleigh were glad to meet again; for as friends and companions they had formerly suited each other to the core; Helena and Rachel also were sociably inclined, and while the young men talked together of hair-breadth escapes and adventures in worlds remote, they made acquaintance over the world at home. They soon arrived at the degree of intimacy implied by the use of Christian names; for Laurence introduced Rachel to his wife

as an old playmate of his sisters, and they took to each other straightway.

All her life hitherto Helena had spent in sunshiny, flowery cottages, lightsomely fitted and furnished; but the dusky glow of her ancient rooms at the Hurtlemere House pleased her romantically. She had a vivid fancy and an active imagination both healthily toned and cheerful.

On the first day of February she was out of the garden for the first time since they arrived. The wind had dropped a little, and a pale sunshine gleamed faintly along the ridges of the moors. Laurence still thought the cold almost too severe, but she quite craved for a walk, and he let her go. For some time they kept along the hard frozen lane between high sheltering banks and walls; and then at her special wish they essayed to climb the fell up a path that was trodden daily by Mathew Dobie in going to and fro to the sheepfold. Nothing but young blood and young spirits could have kept them from freezing when they reached the brow; for the wind was keen and steely as a razor. Thence Helena had a view of the dale-world beyond her bower of Hurtlemere. Laurence pointed out by name three or four scattered villages in Mirkdale, as many lonely farmsteads and two church-towers. Then, bidding

her carry her eye along a certain line of moor to the far north, he said she might see Penslaven and Whinstane Tower almost parallel with each other on the horizon; but either her vision fell short, or the winter atmosphere was too hazy, for neither castle nor tower could she discern—only sinuous waves of mountains beyond mountains, and cloud upon cloud, until mist and vapour, wood and hill were all fused and melted together in one grey purplish shade. Two grand old feudal fortresses scowled at each other across the wide valley upon which they looked immediately down, and a rapid, shallow river still ran its swift course between the plains of snow in spite of the long frost. They almost raced down to the mere again, arriving at home out of breath and in a glow of exuberant spirits. Lucy ceased repining at the sight of them, and Mistress Dobie exclaimed in the warmth of her heart, “Bless ’em! it did her good to look at ’em! If they weren’t as blithe and happy as a pair of May birds!”

That was in the morning—in the afternoon snow fell again, and Helena worked while Laurence read to her. When blind man’s holiday came in the twilight, instead of ordering candles, they told stories over the fire—ghost-stories—and Laurence, with his secluded northern breeding, had, like his sisters,

many a flesh-creeping tale to tell. These eldritch legends were rather grewsome diet for Helena's nerves; for though they fascinated her, she confessed to Rachel Withers half laughing afterwards that she was afraid to go upstairs without somebody at her elbow when she had been listening to them.

The east parlour which they chiefly occupied had the best look-out from the house, but it was a very cold room. Helena frequently complained there of the icy draught blowing down on her head, and professed that if it continued she must take to wearing a little black skull-cap like Father Hurst who used to come to her grandmamma's; but Laurence laid a hand atop of her golden curls and vowed he would never see them hidden.

One afternoon when John Withers and his sister had gone up to the Hurtlemere House, Rachel and Helena were left to themselves a short time, while Laurence carried John off into the hall to inspect some newly arrived trophies of his wild travels and hunting expeditions. In their absence Mistress Dobie presented herself in quest of certain household commands, and observing that Helena had thrown a handkerchief over her head, she inquired, with an air of heartfelt earnestness, if she were suffering from a chill again. Helena admitted that she was,

on which the anxious worthy soul said in a voice of solemn entreaty, "Oh! if Master Laurence would only take heed in time and carry you awa' fra Hurtlemere it would be well for ye both. It arn't going to agree wi' you, an' how is it likelings it suld? There's naught I like less to hear young folks complain on than creeps an' shivers o' the skin." Helena only laughed and said Mistress Dobie was an inhospitable person who wanted to be rid of the trouble of them.

"Nay, none so," protested she; "the more in a house the merrier, I allus say!"

"But I like Hurtlemere. I shall never cease to like it. Laurence brought me home to it, and home it will be as long as he chooses."

"I've discharged my conscience!" rejoined Mistress Dobie, spreading forth her hands as if putting aside a responsibility. "I've discharged my conscience, and Miss Rachel there has heerd me. Wilfu'ness has aye doom in it."

"You can tell ghost-stories, Mistress Dobie; I know you can!" cried Helena. "I hear it in your voice and see it in your eyes!"

"Never speak lightly o' spiritual things," said the dame, slowly shaking the head of rebuke. "Ane misbeliever, like my Matt, is enow in a house. Ance a ghost appear til' him an' he'll doubt nae mair, none he!

An' there's that poor washed-out bit of a Lucy—she's for saying *she* don't believe i' no such logic nayther."

"She has been taught that there is nothing worse in the world than ourselves—grandmamma always told us so when we were afraid of going to bed in the twilight," replied Helena, while dimples of fun played rosily about her lips.

"Oh, but there is tho'!" exclaimed Mistress Dobie in prompt and indignant denial of such a monstrous assertion. "Letting alane t' gret enemy o' us all—an' I suppose nobody 'ull dare be so wicked as to go an' set it abroad as *he's* dead—there's folks upo' folks a lang sight worse nor us. Does anybody want to even my good man wi' Black Bill o' Moorhus, who'll come to be hanged if he only live till t' tow's twined; or *me* to that auld witch, Peggy Tristy, who thrives by cursing her neebors uphill an' down dale o' the Red Riggs? Sure o' it, there's a precious crew o' sinners a bonny sight worse nor us. I'll stan' to that whiles I can stan' at a'." And having worked round to earthly views and people, Mistress Dobie resumed her natural voice, dropt her plaintive brows, and became for a few moments a mere quick-tempered woman of this world instead of a lugubrious interpreter of the oracles of the other. But the fascination of ghost-talk was upon her too

strongly for her yet to refrain her tongue from it; for, after a pause to recover breath, she began, to Rachel's exceeding dismay, to narrate that old legend which attached to the Hurtlemere House.

"When anybody iv' this house is marked for death within the twelvemonth," said she, solemnly; "*anybody* mind, there's two White Hands appears aboon their heads, blessing 'em continually. It was a lady iv' the gret civil-war times, they tell, as was blessing three sons afore they went out to fight, when it was borne in upon her heart that she suld never see ane-o' 'em more—*an' she never did*; for they was all slain i' the battle. *I've seen them hands myself*—I've seen 'em oft enew. I saw 'em ower Master Laurence's mother the year she was taken; an' I saw 'em ower my own son—him as stout an' hale a young man as ere a ane i' all t' dale. Yet it came to pass ane December night when the waters was out, and him coming home fra' Brafferton market, he missed the causeway an' fell into the river. We sought him high, an' we sought him low, an' some said he'd 'listed an' gone for a soldier; his father, *he* hoped, but *I* hoped never. Says I, 'I saw the White Hands ower his head only the night afore he were lost, an' alive to Hurtlemere ne'er will he come back.' An' when t' flood went down they found him

where th' water had not been more nor two feet deep. It was his doom; I said nought. He lies i' the churchyard upo' t' hill, where Mathew's kin lie—right-hand side as you go in at t' yett. There's no stone—nought. But I knows where my boy lies.”

Helena looked very grave during this recital of a well-known tragedy, which Rachel Withers remembered as having happened when she was a child; but immediately it was ended, she said, “Dear Mistress Dobie, don't tell Lucy this story; it would terrify her out of her senses. She has been grieving to me already about the haunted loneliness of this place, and I cannot bear to think of losing her.”

“She's but a wan-spirited body, and I wouldn't scare her for all i' the world,” gasped Mistress Dobie with a confusion which betrayed how her tongue had outrun her discretion with Lucy and the legend already.

Helena detected the fact, but she did not drive the old gossip to an avowal, and when she was left with Rachel alone, her only remark was that she thought such traditions as that of the White Hands were the most fabulous nonsense in the world. Of course, Rachel agreed with her; for whatever she might feel or fancy in the mysterious atmosphere of

Whinstane, in the sunshine of Hurtleddale she did not believe in ghosts one bit.

They had some further talk on everyday matters until Laurence and John rejoined them after their inspection of the wonderful bones and skins, spoils of American plains and forests. The rector and his sister then ended their visit and went away, not a single allusion to Whinstane Tower having been spoken by any of the party. Neither had it been mentioned on the previous occasions of their meeting.

III.

No carriage and but one rough cob entered into the modest establishment of Laurence Warleigh and his wife. The weather continued terrible, and when she could not walk she stayed indoors altogether. She sewed and Laurence read, but the winter days were long, and their stock of books was soon exhausted. One day early in March Laurence walked down to the rectory to borrow something amusing, and carried off *Mansfield Park*.

For the first time since his arrival with his wife at the Hurtlemere House, John Withers thought he looked out of spirits, and a very little encourage-

ment brought him, at last, to speak of his father ; he said that he had taken no notice of his marriage in any way—that all the family indeed had treated the announcement with silent contempt.

“It took them by surprise, but surely they have had leisure to consider of it by this time,” said he. “I am grieved for Nell that they have not given her a welcome, and she feels it too. I would go over, but I should not like to have the dogs set on me, which Sir William would do without scruple if he were in a savage mood. I have written to ask Mrs. Damer Warleigh to come and cheer Nell out of her disappointment as soon as the frost breaks up. The girls might have written ; at any rate, *they* have no quarrel with me ; and if Oliver be at Whinstane, as I am told he is, I cannot imagine why I hear nothing from him.”

It was evident to John Withers that Laurence had no idea of the virulence of Sir William's rage against him, and also that he had no distrust of his brother Oliver. His was one of those noble tempers that never suspects. And who could warn him against his own flesh and blood ?

It was about ten days subsequent to this, that Rachel Withers, after a week's confinement to the swept walks in the garden and shrubbery, one

morning summoned courage to go up to the Hurtlemere House by the cart-road. A hard walk it was, and when she arrived there she would have given anything to escape; but Mistress Dobie, unwitting of aught amiss, received her gladly, and ushered her into the east room; and when she entered, there, behold, was Helena weeping, and Laurence at his wits' end to comfort her! Rachel's first impulse was to retreat, but Laurence called out to her not to run away; and while she stood hesitating and feeling wretchedly awkward, Helena came forward and declared sobbing that it was all about nothing—all about nothing, when these were the first tears since their marriage!

Like a pair of babies they confessed themselves to Rachel, and in confessing were perhaps a little comforted. It seemed that Laurence had been writing a second letter to Mrs. Damer Warleigh, and that when it was finished, he tried to tempt Helena out for a walk; but she, cowering over the fire, looked up at him with pitiful eyes and said, "No; the wind was so loud, the frost so cold." He urged that she had walked in worse weather; for though the sky looked lowering, it was fair overhead and crisp underfoot, while the sun had made several attempts to escape from its curtain of clouds. It would do

her good, he said, she was only suffering from a little lazy fit.

Instead of answering him she began to cry, and when he besought her to tell him what ailed her, she could only hide her pretty pathetic face on his shoulder, and say she did not know. He could not understand it in the least. She went on weeping lamentably; not with moans or hysterical shrieks, but as if a gradual flood of tears had been long swelling in her heart, and was now overflowing in spite of her. At this crisis Rachel had the misfortune to intrude upon them. Laurence had little experience of women, or he would have known what an easement it is sometimes to be let alone to weep for no ostensible cause; so he began to fret and fume, and to fancy that Helena was dissatisfied and unhappy, and then he vowed he would carry her away from Hurtleddale forthwith.

At that she opened her lips, and said it was over—her crying fit, she meant—and he must not mind. But he would mind. He railed against his father, against Oliver, against his sisters, for what he called their cruel neglect, and grew so bitter of speech, at last, that Helena was fain in her turn to assume the task of consoler; and brightening up, professed herself ashamed of her childish outbreak, and wondered

hardly less than Laurence himself what had made her give way to such foolishness. Finally, peace was restored.

Sober-minded Rachel Withers went home deeply grieved and anxious after what she had witnessed; she believed she understood it, but she did not *quite*. Helena was no doubt feeling the pain of her unacknowledged position; for she had that tenderness and cheerful kindness of heart that suffer most from unfriendly neglect. She knew when she married Laurence that there was estrangement betwixt him and his father, but she trusted to see it healed, and counted with perfect confidence on his sisters for her frequent companions. She was barely seventeen years old, and until she saw Hurtledale, she never saw lack of family affection. Rachel Withers was good and thoughtful, but she could not make of her the friend she looked to find ready-made in Katherine and Grace; and as week after week went on, and Whinstane was silent, and they made no sign, her disappointment grew certainly very heavy. But neither was it this that caused that overflow of tears which Rachel saw; what it was Helena kept in her heart a secret—a secret even from Laurence.

IV.

The sixth of April was a foregleam of spring. When Rachel Withers rose that morning there was no frost on the windows; a rapid thaw had set in, and the fell was marked in long furrows of black and white; the latter becoming narrower and narrower as the sun gained in power, until only here and there soiled patches lay on the north side of a bush, a boulder, or a hollow in the slopes. The sky was brilliant and cloudless, the wind hushed, and only the sound of the hill streams, flooded by the melting snows and running riot in their pebbly channels, broke the delicious calm of the morning.

John Withers was pledged to a long round of pastoral visits, and after Rachel's duties at home and in the school were accomplished, she began to think she could not do better than redeem a promise she had made to Helena of spending with her the first free morning she found at her disposal; she therefore set off and reached the Hurtlemere House just as Helena was on the point of starting with Lucy for a ramble in the woods to see what they could discover in the way of mosses and wild-flowers. She received her very gladly and explained that Laurence had

gone over to Brafferton, which made her coming the more opportune.

"I have just been telling Lucy that the violets will be out at Everham now," Helena said. "When grandmamma opens the breakfast-room window of a morning before prayers there rushes in such a sweet perfume!"

"And the primroses in Beechwood!" exclaimed Lucy, brightening at the recollection. "Oh, what gatherings we did use to have!"

"We have wealth of wild-flowers too," Rachel told them. "Here comes Mathew Dobie—ask him if we have not."

In answer to their questions the gruff old farmer said,

"Yes, there was snowdrops, primroses, 'niminies, daffydowndillies, blue-bells, king-cups, cowslips an' all sorts i' their seasons—t' woods was like as if they were carpeted wi' 'em. An' up o' t' muirs there was t' gorse, yaller as gould, an' never no more out o' blossom than kissing was out o' fashion; an' i' August wasn't there t' heather, like a royal king's robe o' purple—flowers! ay, there was flowers i' plenty for them as wanted 'em."

So they went up into the wood, splashing through the marshy grass, Helena and Lucy laughing and

gay as a couple of holiday children. They rambled far and wide under the trees, and stayed out gathering beautiful mosses and other treasures for more than two hours; and when they returned indoors Helena and Rachel made themselves busy in decking the east parlour with their spoils of greenery. Helena was much more skilful at the tasteful task than her companion; it was astonishing what pretty, ingenious pyramids she constructed with a few roots of primroses, ready to burst into bloom, mingled with snowdrops, all the mould being hidden in rich, long-fronded moss.

They had concluded their work, Lucy had cleared away the relics, and they were just about to dispose themselves for a comfortable cose by the fireside, when there appeared, advancing up the avenue, a lady on horseback, wrapt in a heavy cloak, with the hood drawn over her head, and attended by an elderly man-servant. Rachel's first thought was of Katherine, but a second glance assured her that it was Mrs. Damer Warleigh, of Bristowe. Mistress Dobie was already bustling out to receive her, and Helena watched her dismount with mingled pleasure and trepidation.

"What a disappointment that Laurence is away," whispered she; and then they heard the visitor's

clear voice in the hall, saying, "So your master is not at home? I am sorry for that, but it is his wife I came to see chiefly. Tell her I am here."

"An' fain she'll be, Mrs. Damer," was the distinct response. "You're the first o' Master Laurence's kin that has thought it worth while to come near her, poor young thing that she is!"

Then the door opened, and Helena met, with a beating heart, first the gaze and then the warm embrace of the dignified old lady, who kissed her several times on both blushing cheeks before she let her go, perhaps because she knew there were tears in the sweet veiled eyes.

"So, my dear, so," said she, soothingly, lifting up her chin, and looking in the pretty face very kindly, "you and I are going to be friends." And then Helena, forcibly swallowing down the sob that had risen in her throat, smiled forth a real welcome. "Laurence is gone to Brafferton, I hear," Mrs. Damer went on, "and, as he is not with us, the next best thing is to sit down and talk about him." And, suiting the action to the word, she let Helena and Rachel take off her cloak, and being ensconced in an easy-chair by the fire, she began—

"I hope you know that nothing but the weather has kept me away so long," she said. "Laurence

is almost my own boy, and I have been anxious to see his wife ever since he brought her up to this wild Hurtleale, but the frost has been enough to pinch an old woman to death. However, when his letter reached me this morning, I said to the squire, 'Nothing shall hinder me from going to see that pair of babes in the wood to-day. Thomas shall saddle me the mare, and I will ride over directly after breakfast; there is a moon, so expect me back by bed-time, and not before.' And now, as Laurence is at Brafferton, I can stay peaceably to see him, and hear his plans. I trust he does not intend to bury himself and you alive here much longer, for I must protest strenuously against that folly."

"We are very happy; we like Hurtleale," replied Helena, who was now wearing her sunniest face. "I do not care for the world."

"The world, the world, my innocent child, what do you mean by *the world*? Solitude is not good for young folks—you will mope and grow weary. Living here always would be to you like planting a rose-bush under the cold shadow of a north wall, and bidding it bloom. It would never bloom, my dear, it would pine away and die. Then, Laurence is a young man, and must have society after his kind or he will be spoilt. You are enough for each

other to-day and to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow in one sense, but there is virtue in variety, and in dulness lie the seeds of many discontents. Trust me, child, dulness will find its way to Hurtlemere if you persist in making it your permanent retreat."

"I am ready to do whatever Laurence wishes," replied Helena, cheerfully. "We have amused ourselves very well so far, and spring is coming. If I had his sisters for my companions sometimes, I should have nothing left to desire."

Mrs. Damer Warleigh made no direct answer to this remark, but encouraged Helena to speak about her childhood, her grandmamma Gwynne, and her bringing up at Everham, every word she uttered reflecting her good feeling, good sense, and sweetness of disposition. "'Twas a thousand pities she was a Roman Catholic!" the kind old lady said to Rachel when they were for a moment alone; but that could not be imputed to her as a fault, and she adopted the fair young wife straightway into her warm affections. They all lunched together, and the afternoon sped swiftly on, four o'clock arriving and bringing Laurence with it almost before Helena had had time to feel his absence long. His eager greeting testified how welcome was this visit from Mrs. Damer

Warleigh, and after personal inquiries and congratulations were over, he immediately began to ask about the state of things and feelings at Whinstane; but in consideration of his innocent wife's presence, she gave the briefest and most reluctant answers.

"Speak out," said he at last; "what is for me is for Helena too; and Rachel Withers knows all about us."

"Your sisters never have been free to do as they would,—you must remember that, Laurence," replied Mrs. Damer in a deprecating tone. "And they are as much under harsh authority now as formerly."

Helena coloured painfully, and looked up in Laurence's face as he exclaimed hotly, "Then they do not mean to come over?"

"Sir William has forbidden them—and perhaps Oliver is not acting quite as he should. I told him so myself."

"Oliver! Has Oliver turned against me? He wrote fairly enough beforehand—was *he* not to be trusted?"

"He is not befriending your cause *now*. He is supreme at Whinstane—he and his Lady Georgiana. Katherine is by no means in love with her; indeed, they are quite antagonistic spirits."

“Katherine has a will of her own, and can exercise it on occasion. And so she is not coming—neither she nor Grace! Never mind, Nell, we can live without them—let them go!”

There was a very grieved look on the young wife's downcast face at this conclusion to her hopes of friends amongst Laurence's family. He continued to speak on as if he made no account of their neglect, but he did not make very great account of it indeed. He was deeply wounded and mortified, for Helena's sake perhaps more than for his own; for though they had that love between them which softens every despoite of fortune, still it was hard to have brought her so far from home and familiar friends, to find only the chilling shadow of avoidance and neglect amongst his people. The heir's wife and unacknowledged—it was a very cruel position for her indeed.

After a considerable pause, Mrs. Damer Warleigh opened the subject of their having taken up their abode at the Hurtlemere House. “We shall stay here,” Laurence replied. “We *must* stay here—we are lucky in possessing even such a home as this independent of my father. And Nell likes it—don't you, my darling?”

“Better than any place in the whole wide world,” was the fervent response.

"It is nonsense to talk about *must*," said Mrs. Damer again. "We all know that there are a hundred ways and means by which the heir to Penslaven and Whinstane might raise money if he would—not that I advise you to resort to wasteful expedients. I could not make out from Oliver, whether Sir William is allowing you anything now or not."

"He has not given me sixpence since I left the Tower last—Oliver knows that very well. As for borrowing money, I do not care to contract any obligations that must make me look forward to my father's death for relief. We are not people of luxurious habits, Nell and I, and therefore we may get along here for a time contentedly enough."

"Oh, yes!" murmured Helena, and gazed up at him with a glorified love and confidence shining in her sweet face.

"I shall buy a pony to carry her about the moors, and we shall remain in Hurtleddale," continued Laurence, warming into a more cheerful mood. "You and your girls will come over now and then to see us, or if you do not—well! we shall live like Adam and Eve alone in Paradise."

"I do not remember that Eve enjoyed the indulgence of a pony," replied Mrs. Damer pleasantly.

"However, you are both young, happy and strong, and a year's seclusion can do you no great harm. If Hurtledale should grow weary you are not under a vow to stay in it, but can avail yourselves of the privilege of changing your independent minds. It is a toil of a pleasure for indifferent folks to get up here, and you are sure to be left pretty much to your own society; but we will see you as often as we can, though I must warn you that we have a grand scheme pending at Bristowe. The squire has all but promised to carry us to Switzerland this summer; if we go it will be early in next month, and then this visit must stand for both how-d'ye-do and good-bye!"

"The gods are against us!" said Laurence half-laughing. "But we shall circumvent them—you will not find us grown over with moss when you come back."

"I hope not," rejoined the old lady; and then they talked on more lightly and pleasantly of Laurence's travels and of the sons and daughters who had been married from Bristowe since he went away, until John Withers came in to take his sister home, according to an arrangement made between them before she set off in the morning.

They walked back to the rectory by the moor and

the High-beck, which was coursing down its rocky bed full and noisily, and when they had crossed by the bridge—for the stepping-stones were quite washed over by the swollen stream—Rachel told her brother how there was no present chance of a reconciliation between Whinstane and the Hurtlemere House.

“I am very sorry to hear it,” said he, and spoke no more until they reached the rectory. By his face he was thinking about Katherine.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

TWO STRINGS TO HIS BOW.

It is good to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.

Old Ballad.

I.

THE sudden break-up of the frost set all the dale free, and everybody began rushing about calling on everybody else, and making the most of the welcome sunshine. Amongst the earliest, Mrs. Sara Grandage drove up to the rectory in the chill dignity-mood which she had chosen to adopt towards her goddaughter since her engagement to Mr. Gilsland had been acknowledged—she declared that she could not reconcile herself to it, and that the more she saw of him, the less she liked him. Sheer prejudice, Rachel was convinced. She did not believe Bittersweet was ever cordially glad to hear of young folks marrying, but how was the world to go on unless they did? She would have cared less for her

opinions, however, had not John also been so obviously of her mind. He had quite wounded her feelings a little while back by saying with an air of resigned weariness that a man need not see much of his brother-in-law if they did not suit. True enough, rejoined poor Rachel, but she should not like her marriage to detach her from her brother or any of her old friends. Her course of true love, you perceive, was not running quite smooth.

Bittersweet had certainly repented her of that grand threat of altering her will. Said she thereanent, "I respect the liberty of the subject, Dumpling, and would by no means restrain a wilful woman from being miserable in her own way; therefore you will get what I intended you to have at my death, but not before. And I am not going to die yet, remember that. My family are all long-lived." Rachel replied that she might live for ever for any coveting *she* felt for her legacy; and then Bittersweet protested, "Ay, but if Mr. Gilsland knew what I have left you *he* would begrudge me every breath I have to draw!"

Rachel grew most eloquently indignant. "Why should you attribute such wicked selfishness to a person of whom you can know so little?" cried she.

"I do not discern in him this vulgar craving for money, though I sometimes wish he indulged less ambitious hopes of worldly advancement. A great position and wide popularity are not essential to my scheme of happiness; I could be quite content never to raise my eyes beyond Hurtleale; but then I am only a woman, and he is a man of spirit and genius!" Bittersweet curled up her nose expressively and said he was nothing of the sort.

Rachel Withers's friends and acquaintance did not fail of their duty towards her in the way of advice and of warning; but they entirely misunderstood her temper if they hoped to detach her from Mr. Gilsland by constant abuse and sarcasm. It was always her propensity to take the part of unlucky or unpopular people, and her sympathy went invariably with the unsuccessful person whom the rest of the world combined to run down. Every word therefore that was said against her lover only made her the more determined to see with her own eyes and judge with her own heart of the good that was in him.

Amongst others, worthy Mrs. Anderside must needs take her to task. "I have known you ever since you were born, Rachel, and you never thoroughly surprised me before," said she solemnly. "How disappointed your dear mamma would be if

she were living now! I always took you for a steady-going, right-headed, practical little body, without a taint of sentimentality about you, and they tell me you have positively fallen in love with our curled Adonis of a curate! I declared that I would not believe it until I had it from your own lips. Now is it true?" Rachel admitted that it was, and the old lady, after indulging herself with a prolonged gaze at her conscious face, exclaimed in a tone of comical vexation, "Won't Kitty be grieved when she hears it!"

"Why should Kitty be grieved?" Rachel rather indiscreetly asked.

"For the same reason that everybody else is grieved—because there is no chance of your being happy with him," was the reply. "My dear child, what can you know of his disposition, his temper, his character? You have been too hasty by half in forming an engagement; it is barely six months since you first met. Look at Kitty and excellent Mr. Crofts, how patiently *they* waited."

"They waited twenty years, I believe, but if I am not married earlier than Kitty I will remain a spinster to the end of my days," retorted Rachel. Kitty was, indeed, hardly a judicious example for her mother to cite, and she became sensible of the fact when the

deed was done; but she continued her lecture notwithstanding.

“For three-and-twenty years did Mr. Crofts remain in the same humble lodging over Jane Nabbs’ millinery shop, and never a complaint did he make in all that time of any want or inattention. Mr. Gilsland succeeded him in the same rooms, and before the week was out I had been down twice to accommodate difficulties. At the month’s end he changed his quarters, and changed them so much for the worse that he had notice to quit before he had occupied his apartments three days; they say the woman of the house rang all the bells for joy when he was going out of it—very insolent of her if she did, but I can quite believe it. Since then he has moved four or five times, and I hear he is now on the eve of another flitting. Each of the womanfolk who has had to deal with him, proclaims him a selfish, thankless, inconsiderate fidget. ‘He’d be cheap at two guineas a week, ma’am, and seven shillings is the money,’ said Jane Nabbs; ‘I don’t know when I’ve been so rejoiced to see anybody’s back as I was to see Mr. Gilsland’s. Mr. Crofts was worth a hundred of him!’”

Rachel was not prepared to dispute that proposition with Mrs. Nabbs or with Mrs. Anderside either, but

she thought and said it was very unkind and very *wrong* to collect and retail to her all the paltry gossip that was circulated against Mr. Gilsland; but she did not believe one half of it—no, nor one tenth part of it! Warming up into fiery indignation as she proceeded, she said, “He has lived hitherto in comparative luxury, and I see nothing wonderful in his failing to be comfortable even in the best of their poor little Brafferton lodgings—I should be rather astonished if he were! It is easy enough to be self-denying and contented in theory, but the practice of most of us would give way if it were tried every day at dinner-time with chops half scorched and half raw, and potatoes to match them, either as hard as stones or boiled to a mummy. It is very fine for people to talk lightly of other folks’ semi-starvation, when they have got a good cook themselves.” By which little oration Mistress Rachel betrayed that her lover was not above worrying her with his petty discomforts at home as well as his lack of appreciation abroad; and for a naturally meek young woman it will be allowed that she came out pretty strong in his defence.

II

If time did not fly in Hurtleddale, it kept even pace and was rarely heavy, rarely lagging. With her domestic affairs, the school, and the poor people, Rachel Withers had few leisure hours on her hands that had not more claims than enough to satisfy. Either Mr. Gilsland was at the rectory or she must write to him; and very exacting he proved in that particular—or there was a visit owing, or Mrs. Sara Grandage dropped in for her spell of contemporary social history, as she was pleased to call her gossip, or something else, unforeseen, happened. She could almost have found in her heart to envy Laurence Warleigh and his wife the quiet leisure of their lives, with nobody going near them, and nothing to attend to but each other.

When spring was fully come, with its fresh beauty of field and forest, on the pony which Laurence, according to his promise, had bought for Helena's service, she rode to Brafferton and back to say her prayers in the Catholic chapel twice or thrice a week; then to and fro the hills, and, as the days lengthened, they made further excursions amongst the dales into other haunts as secluded as their own,

where generation after generation had lived and died, seemingly without ever a thought of forsaking their remote homes for any busier world. Years hence, if God spared them, their existence now would be to look back upon like one long, sunshiny day.

By this time, Helena and Lucy were both quite satisfied with the manner of their new life in the dales. They had made themselves little household interests: they gardened, they had pets of fowls, and their interludes of talk about Grandmamma Gwynne and dear old Everham were becoming more and more rare, until, by-and-by, they promised to lapse into the past and to be almost forgotten in the way of regret. Laurence Warleigh bore the kind of life pretty well. He trudged by his wife's pony far and near in all their wanderings, for he was a famous pedestrian; and at home he was for ever at her elbow, reading to her, admiring her bits of work, and occasionally offering her a little willing but awkward assistance. A very charming picture of Darby and Joan in the heyday of love they made.

One day when Rachel Withers was up at the Hurltemere House, Helena took her into her little oratory, which was a quaint room projecting over the great porch, with three narrow arched windows

looking three separate ways. She had decorated it rather fantastically, as it seemed to Protestant Rachel, with transparencies of saints against the lights east and west, while, reared up in front of the centre one, was a crucifix—the cross in ebony, the figure in ivory, very finely carved. Every inch of wainscot bore a picture, a garland, or some symbol of her faith. Here, also, were her devotional books, and when Laurence was not with her this was her favourite retreat. She was a sincere, pious soul as ever breathed. Once she told Rachel that she had had thoughts of becoming a nun, and called it a “blessed vocation,” but perhaps she found it a still more blessed vocation to be Laurence Warleigh’s wife. He did his utmost to make up to her for the lack of all other friends and affection, and, apparently, with full success. Whatever her wicked little secret that she kept so close, it was not fretting her now: each time that Rachel saw her she looked brighter and happier than the last.

“I wonder whether I shall be as happy when I am married!” thought Rachel, and followed the speculation up with a sigh. Was that sigh ominous of some doubt creeping in? That she had her troubles we have good reason to know.

It was about this time—early in June—that she

went over with John to pay a three days' visit at Floyd's Seat—a visit which had been promised and put off, and promised and put off it would be hard to say how frequently since their return to Hurtleddale. The Grantleys were hospitable people, and never of their own will had their house empty. There was a dinner-party the first evening, to which came Mr. Gilsland in very high feather and his most lover-like and amiable mood. Rachel was content that night, for nobody jeered her or flouted him; he was not intimate with the Grantleys, and for her sake they inclined to think him a pleasing person.

On the following day there was the Annual Archery Meeting held in the grounds, and to assist at it came a considerable muster of company from all round the neighbourhood, which made it the pleasantest, gayest entertainment that Hurtleddale had seen since last summer's closing picnic at Prior's Bank. Rachel Withers never pretended to deny that she was fond of a little cheerful society; and as the curate again appeared on the scene, and again in his genial temper, she had the promise of a day of bliss before her. But it was not destined to go over without a little speck or two of bitterness.

The most talked-about and conspicuous person

at Floyd's Seat on this memorable occasion was that Miss Briggs, who has been mentioned once already, as having distinguished herself by being taken faint in church at Kitty Anderside's wedding. But she was very far from being taken faint now; for she had just fallen into a surprising great fortune by the death of an eccentric old kinswoman, who, though she would never see her as long as she was alive, had made up for the neglect now by bequeathing to her all her possessions—to the prejudice, it was said, of a couple of nephews, whom she had brought up in the expectation of being her heirs. Now an heiress is always interesting, and though Miss Briggs was rather old to be still a young woman, she had not given up irrevocably her pretensions to youthfulness; and her accession to fortune did, no doubt, materially lessen the sum of her years. Rumour varied as to the amount of her inheritance: some persons said it was five thousand a year, others reduced it to two; but let the facts be what they might, the poor spinster had received a mighty increase of wealth, and betrayed, by every air and gesture, that she felt herself to be a person of magnified importance in the eyes of society.

Rachel Withers had heard of her great good luck, and expected to see her flourishing in all

the gloss and crispness of new mourning; but old habits are not got over in a day, and Miss Briggs had apparently adapted to her own service some of the rustiest relics in her deceased kinswoman's wardrobe; for she was wonderfully equipt in an aged black lutestring, tight in the sleeves, with epaulettes, and a rigid economy of breadth in the skirt. Over it she wore a little velvet pelerine, trimmed with bugles, and to crown all, a chip bonnet of antediluvian shape, embellished with a broad, drooping feather on each side. Her unusual splendour gave rise to much criticism amongst her numerous acquaintance; but she bore herself throughout the day with the serene self-possession of a woman who feels herself exceedingly well dressed; and so she was well dressed for Betsy Briggs with sixty pounds a year, but for Miss Briggs, the fortunate heiress, she was, perhaps, rather behind the fashion—at least people said so who were lately from Paris.

She was always a plain woman, but she never looked plainer than on this public occasion; for her affectations and *minauderies* were carried over the borders of the grotesque. It appeared more than once as if she were striving to act up to some comical conception she had formed of what a rich woman ought to be. Not one word did she utter

without contortions of eyes, mouth and peaked-up nose, which she elevated in the air as if snuffing admiration, while she stepped to and fro the lawn amongst the company, viewing herself on either side with the complacency and self-delight of a six-year-old child in its holiday clothes. Oh! she felt grand!

She was not a sweet-natured woman at heart, and the unexpected rise in her fortunes seemed to have brought out in full flavour two or three latent qualities not commonly accounted pleasant. "Yes, ma'am," and "No, sir," were her humble formulas in past times, and to Mrs. Sara Grandage, who was rather arbitrary, but who had done her a thousand substantial kindnesses when she needed them, she was then especially deferential; but now, to Rachel Withers' mischievous amusement, she quite changed her tone—soothed her, advised her, and referred to the precautions necessary at her time of life, though she knew as well as anybody that her ancient patroness hated to hear her age or infirmities spoken of.

It was a queer scene for an onlooker. Bittersweet's bright black eyes sparkled with ire; she always had a repugnance for Miss Briggs as a fawner and toady, even while she pitied and assisted her; but now she was thoroughly disgusted, and declared she was more

odious with her new fortune than ever she had been in her low estate.

"But there is one consolation," added she, spitefully, addressing her goddaughter; "she is such a mean-spirited thing, she will never have the heart to spend her money; she will indulge herself in the pleasures of accumulation—very dear to many who have known poverty!"

Rachel had her sly little laugh at her godmamma, but her own turn with Miss Briggs was coming by-and-by. That lady was one of Mr. Gilsland's very few admirers in Brafferton, and Bittersweet liked to tease Rachel by saying the lean spinster had a secret *tendresse* for him; and he for her cups of comfortable bohea. Of course, Rachel could afford to bear these jibes good-humouredly—*she* knew the curate's real opinion of *old* Miss Briggs. Nevertheless she felt a spasm of very genuine and undignified vexation when the heiress came up to her and whispered in her sharp, tittering, lackadaisical way—

"He! he! Miss Rachel, so you and Mr. Gilsland are to marry! *When?* When he jumps into a fat rectory, and your ship comes home with your fortune? It will be another case of Kitty Anderside and the grey curate, I expect—twenty years'

courtship and a parsonage in the Potteries at last!"

Rachel wished the spinster could have heard a few of the curate's latest criticisms on her own fascinations, then would she have been sweetly avenged for this insolence; but as her benevolent aspirations were only made in her own heart, Miss Briggs retired uninjured and triumphant. She did not like Rachel Withers, for some reason best known to herself, and it was an intense satisfaction to her to feel that she had planted one thorn at least in that successful young woman's bosom.

But in the course of the day Rachel came in for her compensations. Other old friends congratulated her, and said kind things to her; and though Mrs. Sara Grandage would not have been Bittersweet had she not done her little best to dash her goddaughter's contentment, she was not so resolutely malicious as usual. She caught Rachel once standing alone, while Mr. Gilsland, who had been her companion until a moment before, was speaking aside with a stranger; she was smiling to herself at a pleasant thought, and looking so superlatively silly that the opportunity for raillery was too good to be lost.

"Oh, you beatified goose!" cried the old lady,

making a comical caricature of her attitude and expression. "Do let the natural woman come out a little more. What is your lip curled up to your nose for if you are to turn out sentimental? I would never have stood godmother for you if I could have believed you would!"

Here Mr. Gilsland, having done with his friend, advanced to rejoin Rachel, on which Bittersweet withdrew herself, pursing up her mouth and saying, "Now we are going to look niminy-piminy again!"

He asked what were her charming remarks, but did not press for an answer; he knew very well that he was no favourite with the sarcastic old lady at Prior's Bank, and distrusted her accordingly.

John Withers and his sister were remaining at Floyd's Seat over the following day, and therefore they witnessed the dispersion of the general company; and it was not without a pang of acute wrath, that Rachel saw Miss Briggs offer, and Mr. Gilsland accept, a seat in the hired pony-chaise in which the heiress was returning to Brafferton. Mrs. Sara Grandage looked on rejoicing, and with a sudden inspiration of wickedness, said to her suffering god-daughter—"An engagement is not final, Dumpling—nothing is final but a marriage; what will you bet

me that your beautiful curate is not fitting a new string to his bow?"

If a reproachful glance could have killed, Bittersweet had never stirred again from that hour!

III.

"What respect the world pays to money! What court old Miss Briggs receives since the fame of her fortunes spread through the dales! Yesterday when John and I drove into Brafferton there were two carriages standing at her door, and ours made the third—I would not have called, but John said I must. When we got into her stuffy little parlour, there we found the Grantleys and Carltons, whom she was entertaining with conversation in her grand new manner, only dropping now and then by accident into her old servile style. We had not paid her a visit since she came to her kingdom and she received us with the loftiest patronage; we were the last friends who had honoured her, she said. Oh, Bittersweet, how odious money makes odious people!" This moral tag to her story issued with a good deal of expletive force from Mistress Rachel Withers' lips, and her godmamma encouraged her to

go on with the tale of her visit to the heiress ; it was excellent fun to the old lady to see her put out of temper. Until lately she had been almost monotonously sweet and soft ; but nature was asserting herself again without the poor girl's precisely knowing why.

" Well, we had not been there many minutes," continued she, " when in came Mr. Gilsland, bringing Miss Briggs a little pamphlet which it appeared she had commissioned him to procure for her ; and she was so diffusive in her thanks that he tried to stop her—but she would not be stopt until she had had her say out. Then the Grantleys and Carltons took leave, and as soon as they were gone, again did she rehearse her fulsome — ' So *very* much indebted, so very kind *indeed* of you, Mr. Gilsland,' as if he had walked to London and back for her, until John's face expanded into an irrepressible grin, to cover which he begged to ask, if it were no secret, what this precious pamphlet was about ? And she began to say she was not *sure* she might *tell*, with such an affectation of archness and mystery as put Mr. Gilsland quite out of countenance. I could see he was intensely provoked ! "

Bittersweet laughed enjoyingly.

" I wish I had been there ! " said she.

"And after all," proceeded Rachel, "the paper turned out to be neither more nor less than the prospectus of some inferior school where the orphaned sons of clergymen are received at a lower charge than other pupils, and that she wanted the information to help her to dispose of that brace of luckless lads whom her cousin's caprice has left dependent on her tender mercies. She squeezed my hand impressively as I was coming away, and whispered in confidence, 'You see, my dear, a single woman must seek an adviser amongst her friends when her responsibilities are so great as mine.' 'Why don't you go to Mr. Anderside, then?' said I, and left her quite annoyed. Affected old thing! Mr. Gilsland took his hat to accompany us, but on some pretence or other she managed to detain him, and we saw him no more; for we drove straight home after a visit to the rectory. Twice or thrice on the way John broke out into his merry, enjoying laugh, for which there was no excuse that I could see; and when I made him tell me why he did it, he only asked if I had no sense of humour, and said that scene in Miss Briggs' parlour was the finest bit of comedy he had ever witnessed. Perhaps I might have thought so too if anybody but Mr. Gilsland had taken the chief rôle in it; as it was I am afraid

my temper got the better of me, for I exclaimed passionately that Miss Briggs was a detestable woman! which set John off again into a perfect peal of laughter—and it *was* ridiculous.”

Thus far Mistress Rachel with unembarrassed fluency; and then she melted into a flood of tears. Her godmamma looked on as she had listened—with delightful composure; and as soon as the shower was over, said with perfect confidence in the wisdom of the advice she was offering, “Dumpling, if that man gives you the chance, quarrel with him.”

“But I don’t want to quarrel with him,” sobbed Rachel, “and it is all her fault!”

“Then, my dear, he will quarrel with you. I will bet you a thousand pounds to a penny that your faithful swain has fitted a new string to his bow.” Bittersweet spoke with the calm assurance of fate, and though, of course, Rachel did not believe her, the words went down into her heart and made it heavy.

The following day Mr. Gilsland was *due* at the rectory, but he disappointed Rachel and did not come—it was the first time he had failed of his appointment yet. When it grew so late that she knew it was useless to go on expecting him, she set

off for a walk upon the moor alone. On reaching the ridge of the fell that looked over into Mirkdale, there she stumbled on Laurence Warleigh and Helena, seated on a plaid amongst the heather enjoying the splendid June sunset. Helena was looking marvellously lovely, there was the softest, saintliest expression in her eyes. What they had been speaking of before Rachel interrupted them, she could not tell, but the moment Laurence espied her he sprang up exclaiming, "Here is Rachel Withers, now let us be gay! Tell us the news in the dales, Rachel, or how the world wags beyond them!"

There was a little effort in his manner, and Rachel would gladly have excused herself, and left them to their own company, but they would not permit her to escape, and they walked as far as the High-beck together. The stream was rippling over the stones with a pleasant fulness of sound, and somewhere down in Mirkdale there was the ringing of church-bells which chimed musically in with its melody. It was a sweet summer landscape such as Rachel would have enjoyed with the inmost fibre of her nature, had not a strange feeling of doubt and depression kept thrusting itself like a cloud betwixt her and its beauty. She carried the haunting presentiment home with her, and asked herself a hundred times

during that dreary, sleepless night—could all the world be just in lightly esteeming her lover, and she alone wrong in taking him for a true man?

IV.

Said Bittersweet with good-humoured sarcasm, "There is the wooing that is all butter and honey, the wooing that is all sugar and spice, and the wooing that is all scratch and claw, snap and snarl—which is yours, Dumpling? If you grow thin and ugly over it, I will never forgive you!"

"Am I growing thin and ugly over it? I am a good deal worried in my mind, and that is the fact,"—a great confession this for a girl like Rachel Withers to make, especially to a woman who had been against her all along. She made it about a month after the archery gathering at Floyd's Seat, since which her tender little affairs had been going altogether wrong. She wished she were a little happier. She could not persuade herself into a belief that she either was contented, or ought to be contented, while things continued as they were. It was quite impossible to guess what had lately come over Mr. Gilsland; she never felt less bright or cheerful than after a walk and talk with him; he wore and discouraged her mind

with complainings and gloomy previsions as empty often as they were useless. John Withers had ceased to intermeddle either one way or another; he saw his sister was worried, but she had made her engagement with her eyes open, and in defiance of his opinion, and she must bear the brunt of discovering her mistake—an engagement was a more serious business in his views than in Bittersweet's—she would have broken a dozen rather than not. How different this love-making was to what poor Rachel fancied! No pleasant, sunshiny hours of quiet converse now their mutual strangeness was gone—nothing but thorns, prickles, uneasiness!

“If I knew how to satisfy him I would do it—he knows I would, and yet he is always finding fault with me,” said she in pitiful, querulous accents, which were balm to her godmamma's ears.

Only the last time he was at the rectory he had said to her with cutting coldness, “You have no sympathy with me, Rachel; you never attempt to realize my position. If I tell you how Mr. Anderside leaves the burden of the parish on my shoulders, you answer that he is growing an old man—as if *that* had anything to do with it. A little condolence would please me far better than your constant cheerfulness. You do not feel how alien to all my tastes and all my

habits is the stagnation of provincial society. I die in it—sometimes I am capable of any rashness to deliver myself from it. You suggest that I should resign my curacy here and seek another elsewhere—that does not sound as if *you* valued my company much, but I will let it pass as well-meant, though I must remind you that curacies with stipends of one hundred and fifty pounds a year are not waiting to drop into my mouth directly I open it. No, I see nothing before me but years of this distasteful drudgery! It is sheer madness for a gentleman to take orders unless he have large private means or powerful patronage; and I have neither money nor friends at court.”

Rachel could not answer him—his thoughts were not her thoughts, nor his hopes her hopes: she never could have imagined how widely they differed unless she had pledged herself to share them. She would have been very happy during a long day of small things with affection to shine on it, but she began to perceive with shrinking reluctance that Mr. Gilsland did not love her as a man must love the woman he marries if she is to enjoy any measure of content—yet still she clung to him.

“Give him up—I would never be so poor-spirited as to bind myself to a man who did not care for me!”

cried Bittersweet, contemptuously. "Besides, it is both foolish and wrong."

"You might as well say it is foolish and wrong to have a pug-nose—it may be against the laws of beauty, but it is not against the laws of nature. And it is my nature to go on loving what I have once loved though it disappoint me ever so," answered Rachel with a bitter earnestness.

"So much the worse for you!" said her god-mamma, and ceased from her reasoning. The sagacious old lady knew that patience, time and the hour would bring this troublesome affair to the end she desired to see.

And in fact that end came very shortly. One day early in August Mr. Gilsland walked over to the rectory; it was sultry weather, and he arrived there very hot, tired and dusty; very much out of love with the world and with himself. Rachel met him less gracefully than usual; she also was heated and weary with a tedious morning amongst the children in the school; and an uncomfortable doubt and dread of him was in her mind. There was thunder in their moral atmosphere, and a general tendency towards storm.

They talked a little while on common things, verging gradually towards personal interests, Rachel

becoming more and more conscious every moment that the curate had something to say which he had yet a difficulty in bringing out. She did not help him with a single word—she had quite enough to do to keep guard over herself.

At last it came, awkwardly, blunderingly, but still it came. Mr. Gilsland was not without a sense of the proprieties, and he knew he was doing a hazardous deed, but he did not stick at doing it. He told Rachel that when he made her an offer of marriage he was under the impression that she possessed a considerable fortune, and he implied that she had herself deceived him.

This insinuation she passed by; he knew he was lying, and she knew that he knew it—but to the first part of his statement she made answer with a steady little face and more dignity than was usual with her,—“No, Alfred, I have only a thousand pounds, and I think I must have told you so.” *She* had not told him so, but he had been aware of the fact some months; John had given him the information when he permitted the engagement. “I think I must have told you so,” repeated Rachel, and then looking straight into his eyes, she added, “but if you repent of your promise *I* will not hold you to it.”

This was precisely what he wanted to bring her to,

but he was excessively angry when it was achieved. He called her all the cold-hearted things in the world, and finally went away in a rage. But he never came to the rectory again, and Rachel Withers' little love-story was ended.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

IN THE WINTERLY WEATHER.

The blank grey was not made to blast her hair.—BYRON.

I.

THERE was something again a little amiss with Laurence Warleigh's wife. Her spirits that were so even were becoming as uncertain as the winds. She fretted about Laurence, and fancied she saw often a look of tedium creeping over his face; her tender heart was smitten with many an aching fear lest their present existence of sweet idleness might grow flat, stale, and burdensome to him. Then, quite forgetful of herself, she urged him to make a change, though what change she could never suggest; but he always answered her that Hurtleddale satisfied him, and until she wearied of it there they would remain.

By tacit consent, they never mentioned Whinstane

or his sisters now, and in this instance Laurence Warleigh's passive stubbornness of endurance began strongly to manifest itself; for though he resented the neglect of his family in silence, he resented it with a very deep displeasure. No doubt but that Helena brooded over it too. She had some cruel moments of self-torment from the thought that she it was who had alienated Laurence from his own people, and many a dread lest a time might come when she should not be there to compensate him for what he had lost. But was he not separated from them almost as widely before he married her? though a door of reconciliation was then open to him had he chosen to avail himself of it. It was a pity that either of them should suffer the matter to weigh on their hearts, however; for what was Sir William Warleigh that any one should heed his displeasure?

There is nothing in this world without alloy. Fondly and faithfully as they loved each other, there were thorns, and sharp ones, in their rose-garden of Eden.

Visitors they had none, besides John Withers and his sister. They were quite out of the world. Laurence Warleigh's bringing up at Whinstane had isolated him from companions of his own age and standing, and his wandering life before his

marriage had helped still further to keep him poor in friends near home. Neither were his present circumstances such as to tempt the gentlefolks of the dales to lay aside their mossy dignity and make advances to the unknown son of the notorious Sir William Warleigh, even did not the distance of the Hurltemere House from all their civilized dwellings make a visit thither in the best of weather a hard day's work. The Damer Warleights, who might have brought them forward, were gone abroad, and they, therefore, lived entirely to themselves; and it was not to be marvelled at if Laurence did now and then crave some more muscular mental diet than his fair young wife's society could afford him.

As the summer and autumn passed over, and November winds began to scatter the leaves in the woods, Helena grew worse. Some unconfessed source of trouble influenced her spirits capriciously. She had long and apparently causeless fits of weeping, and days when she would sit still, pale and speechless, from morning to night. Merry little Doctor Beane who attended her, made light of her freaks, but during the last few weeks Laurence had several times mooted anxiously the advisability of carrying her away from the loneliness of Hurltedale; and

he would undoubtedly have done so had she not now been herself averse to move.

It was one day about this time that she took her courage in her hands, and begged Laurence to let her write to his sisters—she wanted them to forgive her for taking him from them; to think of her gently, though they were never to meet, she pleaded: it would be a happiness to her to know that they did not *quite* hate and despise her. Poor girls, they would have received her with open arms and open hearts had the chance been allowed them! He would not at first, but a little more entreaty prevailed, and he gave her reluctant leave to do as she wished, though he forewarned her of ill-success. She refused to be discouraged, however: she thought she should have skill to move the hearts of two women whose own lives were not very happy, and she addressed them together.

It was a simple, touching little letter that she wrote. Katherine's proud throat swelled as she read it, and Grace cried aloud that she would set off to Hurtlemere that very hour; then their father's coarse voice recalled them to themselves, asking what they were snivelling about, and commanding them to hand him the letter. He snarled and swore over it a good deal, then flung it on the

fire, and, with vindictive bitterness, forbade them to answer it at their peril. Katherine was haughtily silent, but Grace burst into a passion of tears, and was hustled out of the room by her sister to escape their father's rage. Oliver discreetly held his peace, taking neither part, but a day or two after, when Sir William showed signs of relenting before his daughters' persistent entreaties that he would allow them to go over to see Laurence's wife, he spoke strongly against it; sneered their petition down, and said it was a very mean expedient in his brother to let Helena's pen plead for their restoration to favour. Lady Georgina took the same self-interested view of it, and Sir William—always most angry when he thought himself cajoled—renewed his stern injunction to his daughters against either writing or going to the Hurtlemere House. And thus it came to pass that poor Helena's pathetic appeal went unnoticed.

Each succeeding day after it was sent, Laurence or Mathew Dobie went down to the post as soon as the letters were in to inquire if there had come any reply. She too would go to the gate to shorten her suspense in waiting for their return, and it was cruel to see the disappointed yet hopeful air with which she met the empty-handed messenger

returning during the first week. "Nothing yet—perhaps they are away, and it may come to-morrow." But for many to-morrows it did not come, and as the conviction of her utter failure forced itself on her mind she became more despondent and tearful than ever.

Mistress Dobie reasoned with her solemnly, for she perceived that it drove her master almost mad when he saw his darling thus causelessly distrust. "He loves you as his very life is bound up in you," urged the worthy old woman; "an' how can you heed anybody's unchristian spite when that's so? I wouldn't, not I! It behoves you to cheer up and be merry for all sakes; I don't know what Mrs. Damer 'ud say, an' she could see that pitiful face!"

Then poor Helena strove with her weakness, but as she mournfully said, she could not help it. Dr. Beane bade them be patient with her, and prophesied that in due time all would be right again and the little lady happier than ever; but his cunning eye had lately discerned that she had a secret fear on her mind; he could not persuade it out of her, and he said to himself with misgiving—"The child has got it into her head that she is going to die."

And that was just what Helena had got into her

head—foolish Lucy had told her weeping in the spring that the White Hands had been seen hovering over her from the very night Laurence had brought her home, and as her hour of trial drew near, she made up her mind that she *must* die and leave him — *die and leave him*; and all her bitter tears and anguish betrayed how little able she was yet to resign herself and go!

II.

The last time that Rachel Withers saw Helena was in the ensuing January. She found her fitfully gay; Laurence had received a long letter from Mrs. Damer Warleigh announcing their speedy return to Bristowe, and this had enlivened her. He went out for a walk, leaving his wife and her friend together, and they had a gossip over the travellers' news, during which Helena smiled more genuinely than she had smiled for months. But the brightness did not last. When she passed from foreign adventures to speak of Mrs. Damer Warleigh's influence at Whinstane her face clouded over again with a weary depression. "She is my last hope of a reconciliation between Laurence and his family," said she. "If anything should happen to me he will never forgive them—the

breach will never be healed. By any means and on any terms, I yearn for it to be closed before my child is born."

Mistress Dobie had occasion to enter the room while Rachel was there, and on Helena's remarking that the lowering of the storm-clouds reminded her of the weather when Laurence brought her home to the Hurtlemere House, "What a long, long time ago!" she looked round at the gentle creature and exclaimed: "'Deed but you'll find t' years 'll be short enew by an' by! As you grow auld like me you'll hardlings care to count 'em, they'll flee so fast."

A convulsive shudder ran through Helena's frame from head to foot, and with a smile more touching than any tears, she said, "It was only the White Hands over my head—I feel them often now. Do you think they are blessing me to a long life, Mistress Dobie, or do they hover over me for a warning, 'that the blank grey was not made to blast my hair?'"

"White Hands and fash!" exclaimed the dame with well-acted contempt but genuine alarm; "my dear lady, it is but an auld wife's tale that you shouldn't give heed to—more shame to me that telled you! Ignorant folk take up wi' that sort o' logic,

but it is not for us as knows better. Pray, never let Master Laurence hear you go on wi' that."

Helena glanced at Rachel half amused, but when Mistress Dobie had gone out she said very quietly and resignedly, "Don't call me weak, Rachel, but ever since I got to know how they told a story in the dale that the White Hands were seen over my head from the first night that Laurence brought me here, I have felt sure I shall not live. I kept it to myself and fretted over it terribly once, but it does not weigh on me so sadly now. God has given me peace, but my heart breaks for Laurence! We have been very happy together—I am only a little fondling thing, but oh, how he loves me! It is almost pain to think of it now; I wish I might have stayed with him a little, *little* longer. And he does not know—he does not know that I must go!"

Rachel Withers could never afterwards recall her words, and the look on her face, without the tears starting to her eyes. She said whatever she could think of to reassure and comfort her, but to what purpose was it reasoning against such a fixed imagination—a prevision so likely to bring about its own fulfilment? When Laurence Warleigh returned from his walk, she kissed Helena good-by and went away—kissed her and said good-by for the last

time! Mistress Dobie let her out at the front door, and whispered earnestly as she did so, "Oh, Miss Rachel, don't be long o' seeing my dear lady again. She frets sorely after being friends wi' them proud misses at Whinstane; she'd fain bespeak their kindness for th' lile bairn she thinks she'll ha' to leave as soon as it comes into this cauld world; and her heart does not misgie her for nought, I know."

No,—Helena's sweet face looked like one that was never to grow old, and the Shadow of Death was haunting the dim chambers of the Hurltemere House already.

III.

It was through a heavy snow-storm that Mrs. Damer Warleigh, two days after her return to Bristowe, rode up to Hurltemere, an urgent letter from Laurence having reached her by a special messenger at noon. It was night when she arrived, and everything was dark except a single thread of light stealing through a chink in the closed shutters of an upper chamber. The deep snow muffled the sound of the horses' feet, and no one appeared to admit her until after a second and lengthy summons.

At last Mistress Dobie presented herself at the door, looking dull and bewildered, like a person suddenly awakened out of the leaden sleep of utter exhaustion; and as Mrs. Damer Warleigh stepped across the threshold, she said, with laconic despair; "She's dead—it's all ower, an' she's dead, an' done wi' her troubles!"

The visitor asked for Laurence and was answered; "He's out somewhere i' the storm; bite nor sup hasn't passed his lips sin' morning. Oh! Mrs. Damer, but we ha' had a time o' it!"

Mrs. Damer Warleigh walked through the house into the kitchen and stood before the fire, the snow melting from her in tiny rills as Magsie, stupefied with crying, relieved her from some of her heaviest wraps. Mathew Dobie was smoking his pipe in his chimney-corner with his usual calm philosophy; Lucy was not visible, and Mrs. Damer asked for her.

"She's gotten charge o' t' babe, an' as it keeps her fra fretting that's ane bother out o' hand," replied Mistress Dobie. Mathew now considerably proposed to go with his lantern in search of his master and bring him in, but his wife thought he had better let him be. "It don't do to mell' wi' folk i' his frame o' mind, they comes to best by thersels'," said

she. "He wer worse nor mad this morning—it wer awfu' to see him. An' oh, the wicked, wicked words he spoke! I hope God A'mighty don't hearken to men when they're out o' thersels? She were sensible to the last, poor pretty cretur that she was, an' good as pretty!" Mrs. Damer inquired if the child was a boy or a girl.

"A girl, an' it's not ~~miss~~ considering. No fear but it 'll live, Doctor Beane says; an' we ha' sent for Mary Wray, as has just lost her own baby, to come nurse it. Lucy has ta'en to it amazing, an' I ha' shifted 'em quite out o' Master Laurence's way; for oh, Mrs. Damer, I don't think he's *safe*. When she was gone, he flung out into t' storm like ane possessed, an' he has never come nigh hand t' door-stane since. It's cruel to see her lying there, an' him raving demented out up o' t' fell. There I see him this afternoon crying—Lord, how he was crying! Them at Whinstane's gotten much to answer for, indeed ha' they."

After some time Mistress Dobie led the way to the silent chamber where Helena was lying in her dreamless death-slumber,—poor little loving, aching heart at rest for ever! Mrs. Damer could not refrain herself from weeping aloud as she gazed at the marble face, and remembered the happy young

wife she had left in her earthly Eden but a few months ago.

While they were standing there the hall-door opened and shut, and Mistress Dobie said in a frightened undertone,

"That's Master Laurence's foot coming in wi' Mathew—pray he don't break out again!" and she would have closed the door, had not Mrs. Damer said, "No, let him meet her there;" and the next moment he came into the room, drenched, wild, incoherent.

The kind old lady took his hand and said, "Ah! Laurence, I did not look for such a greeting as this! It is a bitter, bitter bereavement, but God's will be done!"

"Was it God's will? Nay, it was their devilish pride and cruelty that killed her!" exclaimed he hoarsely. "She could not bear it—it broke her heart. They killed her, I say, they killed her; hell's curse upon them all!" and his voice rose to an awful cry.

"Hush, Laurie, hush, in this holy presence," whispered Mrs. Damer. Her tone and manner subdued his frenzy, but when she would have had him quit the room with her, he stubbornly refused, and stayed all night watching by the unconscious

clay. The last twelve hours had done on him the work of half a lifetime.

As soon as the news reached Whinstane that Laurence's wife had borne a living child and was dead, Sir William Warleigh sent Oliver over with leave for her to be laid in the vault at Penslaven; but Laurence refused to see his brother, and returned for all answer that neither her dust nor his should ever come to the place of his kinsfolk. She was buried therefore in Hurtleale churchyard just below the chancel-window.

While Helena lay dead in the house, John Withers was sent for to baptize her child. The name given to it was *Annis*.

IV.

As the winter went on Laurence Warleigh settled down again in a certain fashion, if that can be called settling in which every hour of a man's life is marred by a tormented restlessness, a feverish impatience and anger against God, against his kinsfolk and against himself. His kind nature was embittered, his generous temper warped and soured. He went and came about his house in a dogged

silence, dark, down-looking and miserable. He suffered the canker of resentment to eat into his heart, and was as deaf to all overtures from Whinstane as Whinstane had been to his while Helena lived. Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the Squire spent themselves in urging him to leave Hurtlemere with its many sorrowful memories, even if he resumed the wandering life he led before his marriage, but all in vain. He expressed a determination never to remove from the house where his darling and he lived through their brief happiness; and though not much weight could be attached to a resolution entered into in a season of vehement grief, the event proved that he had as much tenacity of remembrance as quickness of suffering. His old charm of manner, his fire and freedom, were quite gone, and in their stead reigned a harsh sullenness which Mistress Dobie excused by pleading that he was not at all times himself—that he was half mad, in fact; and indeed, his conduct was marked in many instances with something stronger than eccentricity. Mathew Dobie averred that there was no little of Sir William's wild blood in him, and that a dour man would he be if he lived and let it get the better of his mother's milk.

He testified no thought for his child, and if it were

brought of set purpose in his way he never noticed it, greatly to the ire of its foster-mother, of Lucy and of the other womankind in the house. The little creature being named Annis, and born on a Friday, was, according to all old wives' prognostics, predestined to be much under spiritual influences, and unlucky in its temporal concerns; but thanks to the care and good nursing of Mary Wray, in its infancy it grew and thrrove apace.

It was about midway in the month of March that Katherine Warleigh did rather a venturesome thing in defiance of her father's commands; she rode over into Hurtleddale, having left the Tower alone by the connivance of a favourite servant before the rest of the household were astir, and arrived at the rectory just as John Withers and his sister were sitting down to breakfast. She had come with the determination of seeing Laurence and his child, and of persuading him if possible to be reconciled with them at home; Sir William's wrath was rising again after a temporary lull, and Oliver was doing his utmost to keep it warm; now or never therefore must be reunion.

The brilliant freshness of the morning had tinged Katherine's cheeks with an exquisite bloom and made her look exceedingly handsome, but when she

came to sit quiet and talk troubles over her countenance fell and the beauty dropt away from it. Her account of the state of affairs at Whinstane was not cheering; Sir William was as violent and tyrannical as ever, and Oliver and Oliver's wife ruled the household despotically. Katherine was by no means inclined to think her sister-in-law's presence at the Tower an advantage.

Grace's correspondence with Arthur Hill had been discovered about six months before, and at Oliver's instigation peremptorily forbidden, and her naturally weak health and spirits had sunk, in consequence, lower than ever. Oliver carried all with a high hand, and appeared to be feathering his own future nest luxuriously out of the convertible wealth of the estate; but to his wife the monotony and dreariness of life in the dales was a most irksome bondage. She kept almost as much in her own rooms as did Lady Foulis, and had brought no society whatever about the Tower. Katherine described her as a highly accomplished, frigid woman, very plain but elegant and distinguished in air and manner. She was the daughter of a spendthrift Irish earl, and had been educated abroad; she was full ten years older than Oliver, and the fortune for which he had the credit of having married

her came from her settlement at her first marriage with a great brewer; in this he had not been very far-sighted, however, for at her death the whole of it would revert to the family of her first husband. Her children—she had two now—were kept in superlative good order; “Indeed,” said Katherine, “they are trained never to speak above their breath, and as for *crying*—they dare not do it! Even the baby is subdued and behaves as beautifully as if it were made of wax and moved with wires.”

She had fifty questions to ask about Laurence and his little daughter, but John and Rachel could only tell her what they heard by common report themselves. They never saw him now except at a distance riding along the road; he had not been inside their doors nor they inside his since the day of Helena’s funeral. Mary Wray lived up at the Hurtlemere House, and little Annis was said to be “a mighty fine bairn;” but John, who baptized her, was no judge of babies and Rachel had not seen her. They showed Katherine Helena’s grave under the chancel window; there was no memorial stone upon it—only a young cedar that Laurence had planted with his own hands a few days after she was buried. In reference to that letter the neglect of which had caused Helena such bitter pain, Katherine said

explicitly that had not Oliver interfered, Sir William would have granted her request, and have permitted them to come over; he was in great hopes her child would prove a boy, and intimated that if it did, he would make its birth the occasion of forgiving his son, and of doing what he called 'the right thing,' by him. His rage and disappointment were terrible when the last news reached him, and there was such angry division betwixt him and Oliver for some time that there was every probability of the second establishment at Whinstane being driven away. But Oliver was conciliatory and plausible, and had made himself so necessary to his father that the breach was of no long continuance.

When Katherine had rested at the rectory about an hour, John Withers went up with her over the moor to the Hartlemere House; but Laurence was gone out on horseback no one could tell her whither, and from the orders given to Mathew Dobie before he started, he was not looked for back until nightfall. This was grievously disappointing after the risk of her father's anger that she had run; but she saw the child, and thought its appearance and tendance all that could be desired. Mary Wray was affectionately attached to her nursling.

This was scarcely the opportunity for John to

advance his own cause, but nevertheless he drew some encouragement from Katherine's visit. Oliver had put a period to Arthur Hill's correspondence with his sister Grace on the score of inferior position, and the same plea might be raised against himself; but Katherine would be less easily turned aside than Grace when her feelings were once engaged. On the whole he gathered some hope from her having betaken herself to the rectory, as to a place where she should find sure friends; and Rachel threw her word into the balance with it, by saying that their preference though still unspoken was mutual, and to an observer quite evident.

V.

Two days after Katherine's ride into Hurtledale there came a rumour that Sir William Warleigh was dead—rumour was right for once; he was dead, and Sir Laurence was come to his kingdom!

It would have been sheer hypocrisy to put on faces of sorrow. Kester Greaves even came to the rectory to ask if he was to ring the bells for the new Squire. "Not until the old Squire is buried," replied his master; and then the man seemed to understand that such premature public rejoicing

would be indecent. "But," muttered he, as he retired from the study door, "that 'don't prevent folks fra' being glad all t' same."

It did not—Sir William Warleigh's death was a positive source of relief and congratulation to many. There is always hope in the heir, and Sir Laurence could scarcely fail to reign better than his father had done. Whinstandale began to look forward to happier days than it had enjoyed for many years. It seemed doubtful to the sagacious, however, whether he would fulfil their expectations; for his first exercise of his new dignity was a refusal to attend at his father's funeral—a measure which everybody reprobated with horror, and none more loudly than his brother Oliver.

The old Squire's death had happened on this wise. He was thrown from his horse when out hunting, but no bones were broken, and except from the shock, he did not appear at first to have sustained any material injury. He was alarmed for himself, however, and bade Oliver summon his son Laurence.

"Pooh, pooh," said Oliver, "let us see how you go on."

The next day Sir William became more urgent. "I will see Laurence; I tell you it is all over with me, and I must see him." Oliver pacified his

impatience by promising to send for his brother on the morrow, but he did not send; and on the third day Sir William was dead.

When the funeral procession was formed and ready to start, there happened a curious incident. Down from her Tower came Lady Foulis draped in heaviest mourning and took her place as chief in it. It was whispered about that she was Sir William's *mother*, and those who had seen him in his coffin averred, that he showed in his dead visage something of the old Warleigh race that living he had never shown.

Then were the old stories revived to be a nine days' wonder, and to fade back again into fable-land when the gossips' tongues were tired of wagging. Colonel Warleigh's legend of his finding of the child, which had gained universal credence at the time he invented and circulated it, was never disbelieved until fifty years were gone and the object of it was in his grave.

"Well," said old Mr. Anderside when he heard the last bit that had been added to the marvellous story; "I never gave the Colonel credit for so much ingenuity in lying. He told me the tale with his own lips, and I took it to be as true as gospel; there must have been something desperately bad in the facts

when he made that cloak for them. But there is no profit that I know of to be got out of speculating on them at this time of day——”

There was not, and beside the dales' world in general had quite enough to do in speculating about the heir—a much more interesting subject of talk than any dead Squire could possibly be.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

Whereunto is money good?
 Who has it not wants hardihood,
 Who has it has much trouble and care,
 Who once has had it has despair.

I.

"I AM not surprised, and there is one comfort, Dumpling—you are not likely to break your heart over it;" was Mrs. Sara Grandage's reply when she heard from Rachel Withers' own lips that her engagement to Mr. Gilsland was at an end; then she bestowed on her one of her rare kisses, and bade her never mind! As if she did—no, she was very, very, very glad it was over; she felt nothing so strongly just then as a sense of relief at her deliverance. When the quarrel was new, indignation bore her up; then came a reaction of doubt lest she had done wrong in her haste; and finally ensued the

calm satisfaction of having freed herself and him from a yoke which to wear would have been a life-long misery to both.

"You don't look the disappointed woman either, Dumpling, that is another blessing," went on her queer consoler. "Your cheeks will soon be apple-red and round again, which is more than they have been for these two months past. Now, child, give way; let yourself go, and help me to pull him to pieces. You can see him with the eyes of the flesh now he has rubbed the glamour off, and isn't he provocative of sarcasm? Don't look so demure, I know you are feeling downright wicked!" Perhaps she was, but she refrained herself; it would have been very unhandsome behaviour,—and possibly even yet a little against the grain,—to chime in with her godmamma's mocking tone.

"He will marry Miss Briggs before the year is out and won't he have a treat in his wife?" Bittersweet went on, derisively. "Oh, lucky Miss Briggs! Oh, blessed Mr. Gilsland! Don't be mortified, Dumpling, but I saw your charms grew pale in the curate's eyes the moment she appeared in her coach of fortune. You have shown a prompt and generous magnanimity in giving him up that all your friends admire; but tell me truly, are you not jealous?"

“Jealous—as if one *could* be *jealous* of one’s grandmother!” exclaimed Rachel with sovereign contempt.

No, Rachel Withers was a sober little woman, not liable to the commotion of violent passions. Perhaps it was not in her nature to be acutely jealous of anybody or anything; those anguishes she had read of in romances found no echo of affinity within her gentle bosom. A silent, long pain, a deep, secret mortification she could exhaust in all their bitterness, but she was not the person to protest that all life was wasted, or to worry her neighbours because the love on which she had set her heart had come to such a ridiculous end. On the contrary, she became more assiduous than ever in her visits amongst the poor, and never relaxed for a single day her attendance at the school. Some persons may argue from this sensible conduct that she never really loved Mr. Gilsland at all; if she did not, she fancied she did; and it comes to precisely the same thing in the end, when there is no opportunity given to prove it.

Now though he had used her ill, she did not even yet think *very* ill of him; and all her godmamma’s sarcastic predictions did not make her believe that he would do so conspicuously foolish and mercenary a

deed as a marriage with Miss Briggs would be. Miss Briggs was, without metaphor, old enough to be his mother. Her temper was bad, her manners were disagreeable, and her person was not only unattractive but obtrusively ugly; good folks say we should not call any of God's creatures ugly, but she *was* ugly with affectation, pretension and ill-nature. Rachel knew the curate was afraid of being poor—which is a very different thing from coveting great wealth; but she refused as long as facts would allow to credit that he could fathom that abyss of absurdity and greed into which a man plunges when he sells himself to a woman made of money, and of nothing but money.

Events, however, were too strong for her faith. October was not out before an engagement between the handsome curate and the fortunate heiress was announced; and November was not out before they had ratified it in Brafferton Church in the presence of a large and critical congregation. It was done. Rachel could not speak a word for him any more. She could have forgiven him anything but flying to the feet of Miss Briggs! if he had won the prettiest girl in the dale, she would have forgiven them both; but she could not forgive him his cowardly meanness that had earned him her contempt. She was made

ashamed that she had ever loved him, and it was a long while before she could be in charity with herself again for having done it.

Mrs. Sara Grandage, the irreclaimable, curious old gossip, actually went to the wedding, and she told Rachel afterwards that the bride was got up to such a degree of perfection that through her rich veil nobody would have guessed her at more than thirty.

"Nay," said Rachel, shaking her head with a doubtful smile, "no milliner could abolish her ancient gait!"

"But she was padded and puffed and bustled off into an elegant symmetry," continued Bittersweet, spreading her own skirts abroad in airy demonstration of flowing bridal raiment. "Leanness is much more manageable in the hands of an *artiste* than over-redundancy of flesh, and I assure you, Dumpling—and you need not look as if you did not believe me—that all the church admired her *extremely*. She was a miracle of success: she was got up quite regardless of expense: white satin, lace flounces, and scarf, wreath of orange-blossoms and roses, and a sweeping veil that covered her all over. She tottered a little in walking up to the altar, but that was only a proper display of nervousness, which

interested us all immensely, and enhanced her maidenly charms."

Here John Withers, who was present while Mrs. Sara Grandage was giving his sister this florid account, declared that if they were going to quiz so abominably he should leave them to themselves; which he did accordingly, and as soon as he was out of hearing, Bittersweet began to say, "Now, Dumpling, I am sure you are dying to know how *he* looked, but I will not tell you until you ask me the question formally."

"Well, then," said the quiet young woman, "how did Mr. Gilsland bear himself through the crisis of his fate?"

"That was very coolly put; Dumpling, I don't think you have an atom of heart! Well, my dear, he looked very nice and as natty as a dandy parson could. I cannot tell you what he wore, but his clothes were an admirable fit, and his hair was in the glossiest curl; his face was rather blanched, it is true, but I daresay that twice or thrice during the ceremony it flashed across his mind how awfully he was committing himself. I declare it was almost as tragical as the sacrifice of Iphigenia done into a modern version! There was plenty of company, and what the congratulations lacked in sense I

hope they made up in sound. She wept but did not faint. Now, Curiosity, is there anything more you would like to hear?"

Of course, Curiosity would like to hear everything—all about the bride-visits, which were just over too. To this, Bittersweet pretended to demur. She did not make her call on either of the appointed state-days, but took the happy couple by surprise in the sweet confidence of private life, as she phrased it; and she did not think it was quite fair to betray the secrets of families. But her scruples soon vanished before the irresistible enjoyment of telling a funny story.

"You know, Dumpling, how hard it is to teach an old dog new tricks," began she, sinking her voice, "and you may suppose that after all her years of pinching it would be hard to teach Betsy Briggs a wise liberality. I found her sitting in her bleak dining-room, furbishing up an old bonnet for dark days, while the wretched curate was reading aloud to her a missionary report—she was always *goody*, you know. And I assure you he looks already within an ace of hanging himself." Rachel hoped not, and reminded Bittersweet that she had a trick of seeing things sometimes less as they were than as she would like them to be. "I expected you

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would contradict me, and, perhaps, defend *him*," retorted the godmanama, and then she went on with her story.

"They told me about their tour, during which the frightful extravagance of the hotel bills quite spoilt the bride's pleasure. 'But Mr. Gilsland will do everything so lavishly,' she explained, shaking her head at him with fond reproach. Then they discussed the comparative cost of living in the north or the south, and while he was decidedly in favour of London, she said, despotically, (and I wish you could have heard her say it, Dumpling!) 'No, Alfred, dear, we must keep the curacy until we have had time to look round for something else. It would be frivolous to throw away a hundred and fifty pounds a year—quite a competence, *quite* a competence if we had *nothing* else!' We were discussing this topic from various points of view when there came a single premonitory knock at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of the cook carrying a paste-board, whereon were two pie-dishes full of sliced apples. With sulky stolidity, the woman said she had come according to orders to have the sugar put amongst the fruit. But I am much mistaken if the twinkle in her dull eyes did not betray a deep-laid kitchen-plot for the exposure and mortification

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of *missis*. Mrs. Gilsland carried off the incident with a laugh and a domestic truism, but the miserable curate grew scarlet, and when she said to him, 'Alfred, dear, *will* you do it? the sugar is in the sideboard,' the scene was killing. She has him in good order already, for he rose, and produced the sugar, and sprinkled it sparsely over the fruit, while she all the time curbed his extravagance by crying, in a gradually ascending minor scale, 'Enough, enough, enough, my dear, I say, *enough!*' That is what a man comes to who marries for money—his rich wife makes him put sugar into apple-pies. This pleasing addition to his duties appears to be all he has gained yet from his far-sight speculation. You are avenged already, Dumpling, if that is any satisfaction to you!"

"I cannot say it is," murmured Rachel, and there were positively tears standing in her foolish eyes.

"You silly little goose!" cried her godmamma; "why don't you rejoice in his humiliation? Any sensible woman would. And to think in what comfort you would have lapt his soul! how you would have petted him, and cosseted him, and slaved after his every whim and fancy! I hope he likes his exchange, that is all—I should not."

: At the cheerful Christmas season Mrs. Sara

Grandage always made as many musters of her friends as she could, and in pursuance of her annual custom, she invited John Withers and his sister to dine with her on New Year's Day. Rachel did not ask the precise question, and therefore there was no need for a precise answer, but it was both implied and understood that Mr. and Mrs. Gilsland were not invited for the same evening. Rachel therefore went in peace and serenity, looking very nice in white muslin with a sprig of holly in her bright brown hair; but as she was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Anderside, the two last guests, for whom dinner waited, were ushered into the drawing-room, and behold they were the curate and his charming wife! Bittersweet's malicious enjoyment of her trick was beyond description; but the party was large, and happily for Rachel she never came near enough to Mr. Gilsland to make recognition necessary. She had not seen him since that memorable day when they quarrelled and parted.

Mrs. Gilsland was in full bridal splendour all but the veil, her poor old arms and withered neck contrasting sweetly with her shining white satin drapery; it was a cold night, and she looked miserably pinched, but she stoically refused to be made comfortable with a shawl of Bittersweet's, and wore her bride's airs

and graces with a dignity that was most comically impressive. Her husband seemed to shrink a good deal out of sight—liking his situation perhaps as little as Rachel did hers—and somebody made the remark afterwards that he was smaller than he used to be. He had lost his confident manner, and his assurance that he was pleasing somebody—was thoroughly ill at ease, in fact.

It was a very flat evening to several of the company, and John and Rachel both expressed themselves glad when the party broke up; but the sprightly little hostess declared it went off capitally, and to her no doubt it did; for she always found her sweetest amusement in the cross-purposes of her friends and acquaintance.

II.

Rachel Withers did not see Mr. Gilsland again until one afternoon in the spring when she had gone out with John for a walk on the moors. They came suddenly upon him at a turn in the path where avoidance was impossible, and they all made a stand, and spoke like common acquaintance. Rachel was looking as fresh as a rose, and the meeting did not lower her colour—perhaps it was that caused

Mr. Gilsland to say it must be more healthy living high up in the dale than down at Brafferton.

"We hope to leave the place before winter comes round again; for it does not suit my wife at all," he added.

John regretted to hear she was not well.

"She is always ailing, always ailing; but I hope she will be better when I get her away into the south," responded the curate, and lifting his hat to Rachel with a little of his old manner, went off nervously swinging his stick.

"After all," said John Withers, "one cannot help feeling some pity for a man who has taken himself in so grievously as poor Gilsland!"

No, Rachel could never think of him now without being divided between laughing and crying. She actually wished he were more in the way of getting some of the good for which he had bargained. He looked literally shabby and poor when they met on the moor, and his dress was by no means the most remarkable falling off in his appearance. Instead of bettering his condition by a rich marriage he had devoted himself to a slow, lingering, miserable martyrdom. He could not have much abstract pleasure in reflecting that his wife's income verged on three thousand a year when in their present

luxurious establishment they could barely expend three hundred. They had taken a half-furnished house that had stood long unoccupied, and its wants were excused on the plea of its being only a temporary residence; an inferior cook and a very aged housemaid formed the domestic staff, and the horse that was to lighten the poor curate's labours had not been found yet. The only indulgence Mrs. Gilsland allowed herself was an extravagance of physic—one that her husband could hardly be anxious to share with her.

Mrs. Sara Grandage delighted in giving an imitation of her airs of invalidism.

"There she lies on her sofa all day with her face made up into the most *mevely* look, while that wretched curate waits hand and foot on her caprices," said the vivacious old lady. "It would touch the heart of a stone, Dumpling, to see how thoroughly dejected, crushed and effaced he is in his wife's house. Their marriage settlements left him quite dependent on her mercy and charity, and precious little of either does she exercise in his behoof. She is so odiously stingy and oppressive that if I were in his shoes I would try a little bullying."

Even through the magnifying glasses of gossip and scandal it was easy to see a long vista of domestic

misery in that ill-assorted household. They disagreed in public as well as in private, and she invariably got the last word. Mr. Gilsland had tried to deal plausibly with his wife, and while she had the power of the purse he was no match for her at all. Bittersweet delighted to tell Rachel that Mrs. Gilsland always referred to her as "*that girl*," and said she should never wish to see her again within her doors; as if Rachel were anxious to storm her castle of harmony! The reason alleged was Rachel's satirical spirit, but poor body, if she had shut out all who made fun of her, she would have had to shut out every soul of her acquaintance!

There was little present likelihood of their leaving Brafferton, though Mr. Anderside would gladly have been rid of his unpopular curate. Whether it was that Mrs. Gilsland really felt too ill for exertion, or whether it was that she preferred established friends to new ones, it is hard to say, but at all events she was exceedingly reluctant to change her quarters. Bittersweet declared she was as strong now as in her Betsy Briggs' days, and everybody knew that Betsy Briggs was the toughest woman in the parish. She made nothing of walking in and out to Prior's Bank three or four times a week. But now, when she visited her friends, she hired the chaise from the inn,

and went in frousy state, which lavishness of expense convinced Rachel that her ailments were not all fancy, as some folks wickedly delighted to say.

“Who would lie day after day on a sofa in a dull room pretending to be ill?” said she, deprecating her godmamma’s sarcasms. “For my part I would rather dig, or delve, or follow the plough, or break stones on the high road than act such a tedious play for the amusement of the gossips!”

“You are a woman of sense, Dumpling, and Betsy Briggs always was, and always will be, a fantastic fool!” retorted Bittersweet; and Rachel was fain to drop her useless defence.

But a time of reverses was at hand; the heiress had enjoyed barely a year of golden prosperity when fortune decreed that she must return to poverty’s hodden grey, carrying the most wretched of men and curates down with her in her humiliating descent.

“Swift retribution for a man who married for money,” said one.

“Mrs. Gilsland will have to find the use of Betsy Briggs’ feet again,” said another.

Nobody had a word of sympathy at their service or any feeling of pity. Vague rumours flew about the dale for a few days, and then the whole story came out.

It appeared that when Mrs. Gililand's eccentric cousin Dawson died, and her papers came to be looked over for the will, the document discovered, though in all respects regular, was of very old date, and that her man of business openly stated the fact of his having drawn up another which had been duly executed in the presence of his head clerk and himself only two years before. This instrument was not forthcoming, however, when wanted; suspicions arose that the testatrix had destroyed it in the design of making a new one; and this her lawyer said she had twice consulted him upon, without being able to decide as to its provisions; he was daily expecting her final instructions when she was taken ill, grew rapidly worse and died. Her confidential servant also stated that during the last night of her life she appeared much distressed in her mind, but that she got ease when she had sent a message to Mr. Saunderson, her lawyer.

"If I am fit to see Saunderson to-morrow I will," were her words; "but if not, tell him that perhaps things could not be better settled than they are; and the will he made is in the cabinet that my cousin John is to have."

Before morning the old lady was gone; and the recent will not being found where she said, that by

which Mrs. Gilsland became rich and the two nephews were left quite unprovided for, was held to be her true testament, and acted on accordingly.

Thus far the tale flowed without mystery; but now it went that the missing will had actually turned up in the identical cabinet where Mrs. Dawson told her maid it would be found. The cousin John to whom, as a family relic, it was bequeathed, conveyed it to his house; and his wife declining to admit it as too ancient and cumbrous amongst the modern furniture of her best rooms, it ultimately found a refuge in their boys' tool-shed, where it served conveniently as a museum of curiosities. A little while ago one of the tiny drawers in which birds'-eggs were ranged in wool got fast, and the eldest boy, in prizing it open, broke off a splinter of wood, in the cavity beyond which he espied something "glittering like gold." Immediately the young carpenters went to work, and in a few minutes they had discovered three narrow slides, constructed in each division between the centre tier of drawers. They missed the secret of the spring, but found that a piece of wood, not much stronger than veneer, and folding upwards on a concealed hinge, was what had hidden the slides or trays before. In one of these were some old-fashioned trinkets of no great value,

in the second was a miniature of Mr. Dawson, his watch and his spectacles, and in the third was the missing will, and a paper of memoranda which purported to be part of the draft for that new will about which she had consulted her lawyer.

This will Mr. Saunderson declared to be the one he had drawn up. In it the name of Miss Briggs did not occur at all, but amongst the memoranda there was a sentence to the effect that Betsy Briggs must have something—three hundred pounds would be enough. Further the story ran that a compromise had been offered to the present possessors of the property and by them indignantly rejected. Mr. Gilsland was said to have pronounced the recently discovered will an impudent forgery, and to have sworn to fight out the battle to the last gasp. But every one thought the refusal of terms the height of folly, and decided their cause as lost before it was opened. The will had been submitted to competent authorities, the lawyer who made it took oath it was genuine, the opinion of counsel had been heard on both sides and it was against the Gilslands. Popularly speaking, they had not a leg to stand on.

It was a most disastrous downfall! The way in which they had used Mrs. Dawson's nephews was

not to their credit ; they had sent them to a cheap commercial school, though until their aunt's death they had been brought up as gentlemen, and destined to the church and the army. Common decency forbade that they should be turned altogether adrift on the world, but for any sense of kinship that Mrs. Gilsland had testified, they might have starved or gone to the poor-house. She had not borne her prosperity with any grace, and when adversity came she did not bear it with any resignation. As for the curate, he was like some desperate animal caught in a trap, and running aimlessly to and fro in his agony to escape, when escape there was none.

"Don't tell me," said Rachel Withers, shutting her eyes with an expression of pain when her god-mamma insisted on giving her a lively description of his sufferings ; "don't tell me—I cannot bear to hear it ! I think he had quite got his deserts before without losing the money for which he married his odious wife !"

But you see Rachel would have pitied anything fallen into calamity ; it was the way with her. How much soever she might have disliked them in their good-luck, when trouble came, her own wrongs and their disagreeableness she could remember no more.

"Poor souls!" sighed she, "what hard lines theirs will be now for both their lives to come!"

One afternoon she walked over to Prior's Bank, and on arriving there found the old Brafferton chaise standing at the gate; and suspecting who was with her godmamma, instead of at once going in, she took a turn round the beautiful wild-flower walk by the river, intending to keep out of the way until the visitor was gone; but being seen from the window, a messenger was sent to call her to the drawing-room at once.

On entering she found there Bittersweet looking her most ireful and indignant, while Mrs. Gilsland sat in tears, fretting her glove and humbling herself in broken apologies. Rachel hated to see anybody undergoing mortification and abasement, and in the impulse of the moment, threw more warmth into her greeting of the poor soul than perhaps could appear to her genuine; for though she took the outstretched hand, and made some sort of response, she suspected in her bitter heart that Rachel rejoiced in her miseries. She only remained a few minutes longer, and as soon as she was gone, Mrs. Sara Grandage broke out in undissembled wrath.

"You will never guess, Dumpling, what ~~that~~ woman has been here begging me to do! She

wants me to back them with money in this most unjust and abominable suit. 'No, Betsy Gilsland,' said I, 'I will not give you one farthing for any such purpose. I will help you to get away from Brafferton, but that is all the help you need look for from me.' They cannot induce any respectable attorney to undertake their cause, and how is it likely they should? It is as clear as the day that they have no right to Mrs. Dawson's money, and every hour longer they hold it they are robbing those boys. I always thought until lately that Mr. Gilsland had a peculiarly shrewd eye to the main chance, but I am convinced now that he is as short-sighted as all over-clever people are. It is impossible he can retain the property, and yet he is bent on giving the rightful owners as much trouble as he can. He knows perfectly well the will is no forgery—*she*, the weak fool, with her own lips admitted *that*, and afterwards had the audacity to entreat me to support them. No, I told her, I had not lived in honour and honesty for sixty years to turn fellow-swindler in my old age! I was too angry to spare her, I assure you, Dumpling."

Clearly so. When Bittersweet was angry she did not spare anybody.

Of course, every sagacious person foresaw where

this miserable affair must eventually end. When the Gilslands had recovered from their first shock of dismay, horror and rage, they came to their senses, accepted the terms offered by Mrs. Dawson's nephews and gave up the property. Mrs. Gilsland received the three hundred pounds which her cousin had intended her to have, they left Brafferton, and retired somewhere into a doleful obscurity.

But such a man as Mr. Gilsland never retires beyond the reach of temptation; and he had put himself so entirely out of the ordinary grooves of prosperity that it was quite sure to find him sooner or later, and to drag him deeper and deeper into the sloughs of despond.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

SIR LAURENCE WARLEIGH.

La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir ; mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle.—ROCHEFOUCAULD.

I.

IT was now full six months since Sir William Warleigh died, and since, to the reprobation of the whole neighbourhood, Sir Laurence had refused to appear at his father's funeral. He was beginning to drop out of people's thoughts and conversation now. At first the county hoped and expected that he would emerge from his seclusion, and assume his due position as master of Penslaven and Whinstane ; but in this they were disappointed. He never left Hurtle Dale for a single day. They had therefore ceased to wonder over his preference for a hermit-life, and had given up all hope of seeing the Warleighs take their rightful place in society during the present baronet's reign. It was a pity and much to

be regretted, many persons said, that Oliver was not the elder brother ; he was sensible of what rank and wealth owe to the world, and would have regilded the tarnished name of Warleigh splendidly. Lady Georgiana was very strongly of that opinion. By dint of constant harping on the theme, she almost succeeded at last in convincing herself that her husband was an injured person, defrauded of his birthright, and suffering the evils of poverty that a half-crazy impostor might let ancestral halls become howling wildernesses, and accumulate untold sums of rents in the hands of his provincial bankers.

Mr. Bond, the steward, was an honest, conscientious man, or he would have found his office under Sir Laurence one of vast temptation and opportunity ; for his master committed all to his charge, and found apparently neither interest nor enjoyment in his possessions. He had made no change whatever in his manner of living, which was as rough and plain as that of a simple yeoman farmer. From time to time various rumours had flown abroad respecting his ways and habits, all more or less derogatory to his credit, and mortifying to those who were personally interested in his honour. He was said to frequent low company and to drink deep, but both these scandals were without

foundation. He was abstemious in Helena's lifetime, and since her death, a more unsociable man, whether with equals or inferiors, could not have been found throughout the length and breadth of the dales.

Gossip said her say, and probably Sir Laurence heard never a word of it. With his dogs and his gun, his horse and his boat on the tarn, his pipe, his newspaper and his books, he had made himself quite independent of the world with which he had quarrelled. So rarely had he seen his child that Mistress Dobie was ready to lay a wager any day that he would not know it if he met it in an unaccustomed place; many and many a time had Mary Wray and Lucy pranked it out in its best, and waylaid him in the hope that he would notice it; but he never did, and his manners were so surly and alarming to the women that they agreed at last it was safest to keep it altogether out of his sight. Through the intervention of Mrs. Damer Warleigh a sort of reconciliation had been established between him and his sisters, but Oliver he had peremptorily refused to see; though for the present he permitted him to continue at the Tower. With his sisters there and Lady Foulis, it was impossible immediately to disband the household; but it was understood that at the end of the year's mourning for their father a change must be

made. Lady Georgiana was in the practice of declaring that *they* must then go and live somewhere abroad for *economy's* sake; she might more truly have said for *pleasure's* sake; for they would really be able to flourish with great bravery on the fine spoils they had contrived to glean during the later months of Sir William's lifetime. Laurence not being there to interfere or remonstrate, all the finest timber on both estates had been ruthlessly swept down and turned into money to satisfy Oliver's rapacity.

One day about the time of falling leaves, Mrs. Damer Warleigh, after a visit to the Hurltemere House, called on her way home at Prior's Bank, where Rachel Withers happened to be spending the afternoon with her godmamma. The excellent old lady fell immediately to talking of Sir Laurence, and said she was afraid he would turn out nothing but a disappointment to her and the Squire. She could not understand his persistence in remaining in Hurtleddale when the luxuries and glories of Penslaven and Whinstane were at his disposal, and his conduct at the time of his father's death she freely characterized as monstrous and unnatural. There are some people who cannot change their mood as easily as their gloves, and Sir Laurence was one of them.

"He allowed me to overwhelm him with reproaches and good counsels without uttering a word in his own defence," said the visitor. "There *he* sat and there *I* sat—he smoking like a kiln, I lecturing until for lack of breath I could lecture no longer. It is very provoking to see him so given up to regret and indolence as he is, and nothing will stir him out of them seemingly. The baby is a capital little creature, but not a bit like Helena, and he does not seem to care a straw for it, though he will not entrust it to his sisters. By-the-by, Rachel, how is John?"

This question sprang palpably out of some thought of Katherine, and Rachel answered that he was very well, on which Mrs. Damer said, "I should like him to come over with you to Bristowe for a few days next week if you can spare the time; Katie and Grace are both coming, and now that all my own girls are married and gone, the place is dull for young folks unless we can gather several together at once." Rachel accepted the invitation on her own responsibility; she was sure John both could and would make leisure for that visit, though for most people he was ever ready with an excuse. And Rachel herself would be very glad to see her friends again.

II.

Bristowe was a pleasant house to stay at, and two of its guests, at least, vastly enjoyed its social opportunities. Mrs. Damer Warleigh was not properly a manoeuvrer, but John Withers and Katherine had not been there two days before she had brought about a thorough understanding between them. It was an engagement at last. She was twenty-six and would not need to ask anybody's consent to being happy in her own way and according to her own choice, even had there been any likelihood of opposition from her brothers, which there was not. Sir Laurence declined to interest himself in his sisters' affairs altogether, and several times since their father's death Lady Georgiana had proclaimed her opinion that his daughters would be better off settled in homes of their own, though ever so humble, than left to themselves at Whinstane Tower when she and Oliver deserted it. There could be no two views on the subject. Both the Squire and Mrs. Damer Warleigh professed themselves gratified by Katherine's choice, and to all appearance John and she would be a very evenly-yoked couple. She was looking remarkably handsome at Bristowe, and

though to Rachel's mind she was neither so tender nor so attractive as Grace, she was much better suited to John.

Whatever virtue Rachel lacked, she did not lack patience in listening to lovers' rhapsodies, and they all seemed with one consent to have elected her Old Woman to hearken to their respective experiences. She was astonished how naturally she fell into the character. Could she be on the verge of finding her vocation in the world? Was she really going to be that somebody who, having no more particular rejoicings or grievances of her own, was always to be called on to sympathize in those of other people? It began to look rather like it. Bittersweet used once to provoke her by saying that she was cut out for an old maid, but she had come to think so herself now; and though she would not be one-and-twenty until December she had quite made up her mind that the best part of her life and adventures was over, and she bore the belief very patiently. She was always a quiet young woman.

Arthur Hill was at this time in Syria, and his correspondence with Grace Warleigh had never been renewed. She was looking sadly pined and disconsolate at Bristowe, and spoke in a plaintive voice that had tears in it perpetually. One after-

noon, wandering with Rachel through the wood-walks, they saw John and Katherine a little way in advance, but so completely absorbed in each other that they heard no footsteps behind them. The friends turned off, therefore, into the fields, Grace saying, "Do not let us disturb them; I am ashamed to show my face where happy people are," and her sickly smile and sigh contrasted painfully with what she knew to be the contented state of the inobservant lovers.

Presently, and of her own accord, she began to speak of Arthur Hill, and to tell Rachel how roughly Oliver had behaved to her, and in what a peremptory, assuming strain he had written to Arthur to forbid their correspondence.

"He never wrote to me after," she went on. "I almost expected that he would set Oliver at nought, but on some points he is very sensitive. I was debarred from going to the rectory, so that I had no chance of hearing of him or of sending any word through his mother. I believe it is all over between us for ever, and I was very much attached to him. How do women console themselves for these separations? I hardly knew how Arthur was woven into all my daily thoughts and future hopes until Oliver sundered us. It is not possible that I should ever

cease to love him, ever forget him,"—and so she talked on, pitying herself, and foreseeing no mitigation in the void of her dull life, until all at once she remembered that Rachel, too, had had what is called a *disappointment*, when she manifested some curiosity to know how she had got over it.

Rachel told her more easily than any one would imagine, or than she could have imagined herself beforehand.

"Ah, *you* are so sensible!" said Grace, with a faint inflection of disapproval in her tone.

"It was not a romantic episode to fret over. I could not indulge myself in a sentimental sorrow for the man who married Miss Briggs," replied Rachel, a little decidedly.

"But did you never feel quite downcast and hopeless—as if there were nothing left in the world worth living for?" asked her companion, her countenance expressing that to be quite her own state of mind.

"To speak strict truth, I never did," was the answer. "I was rather lost and vacant at first, and the time hung long on my hands—as time will when we have no central rallying point for our leisure thoughts—but I was not mortally wounded. I tried to get away from my feelings, and God and

my work helped me. I never gave up. Then John was so unfeignedly thankful, and godmamma Grandage did nothing but congratulate me; and by-and-by I knew I had had what I ought to consider a lucky escape."

"I don't think I could ever have regarded it in that light," murmured Grace.

"Perhaps not: we are differently constituted. I turn everything bright side out, and accept cheerfully what I cannot evade. Perhaps if all had gone smoothly, and I had married Mr. Gilsland, he might never have developed the traits he has done; but if he had, I should have been miserable as his wife. He is timorous of ill-fortune, and incapable of withstanding the temptations of poverty and a humble position. Straightforward honesty and plain dealing are not in him. He was paving his way to Miss Briggs' golden graces before our engagement ceased, as his prompt marriage within three months after betrayed. I should prefer good temper and common sense in domestic life before many finer-sounding virtues, and it is in those two qualities that Mr. Gilsland has shown himself most of all deficient. Besides, like many women, I abhor meanness and greed far worse than many more obtrusive vices; and I am really sorry that I have wasted the freshest

of my affections on an unworthy object. It is just my best *lost*. I esteem you much happier in your love than myself."

"I think so, too. Nothing would comfort me for the baseness and treachery of any one to whom I had attached myself."

"Contempt is a swift chiller of affection. So long as one can go on believing in a man one can go on loving him through the most adverse circumstances; but once creep in scorn and it is all over!"

"I have the deepest, sincerest respect for Arthur Hill: I trust and pray it may never change!" sighed Grace; but this time the sigh was lighter, for she found consolation in comparing her own trial with her companion's—hers that *might* end in ultimate happiness, while Rachel's nothing could change.

To make the sense of relief permanent, Rachel, who discerned her thoughts pretty correctly, offered a few pleasant predictions which were quite as likely as not to come true. Christmas would certainly see Arthur Hill home again, and when he found how his friend had prospered with Katherine, he might take heart to renew his suit to her sister. Grace smiled and said Rachel was very kind; and the quiet little woman felt that she had done somebody good.

III.

The following morning, Mrs. Damer Warleigh, Katherine, and Rachel were seated in a pretty room opening into the conservatory, all busy with idle-work and chat, when they saw Sir Laurence Warleigh crossing the lawn towards the house, in company with the Squire and John Withers; his riding-whip in his hand and his country-made clothes white with the dust of the roads. Katherine sprang up, her face radiant with joyful surprise, and called Grace from the library adjoining, for her first thought was that her brother knew of their being at Bristowe, and had come over on purpose to see them.

But such was not the case. He had only met them once before since Helena's death, and he met them now with a quite natural reserve and coldness—a more hopeless temper out of which to educe good family-feeling than anger, howsoever vehement. Grace looked even more white and ill than usual, and Katherine's momentary exuberance fell as quickly as it had risen. They exchanged a few sentences, but only on general subjects, and parted again with the distant courtesy, and, on one side at least, with

the indifference of strangers. They *were* strangers in heart. Mrs. Damer Warleigh was grieved, but the sisters expressed nothing of their feelings, though it was impossible not to perceive how their brother's negligence wounded and disappointed them.

John Withers had some conversation with him which may be described as having had no results. Sir Laurence said Katherine was independent of him, and would, of course, please herself; quite ignoring the circumstance that when she was married their homes would be almost within sight of each other. But John took his churlishness very philosophically: it was enough for him that he had neither opposition nor delay to expect from the head of the family.

Oliver and his Lady Georgiana were so well satisfied with the engagement, that the reply they sent in acknowledgment of the letter that announced it, was accompanied by an invitation to Whinstane Tower; which, in the cultivation of their soon-to-be family relations, both John and his sister accepted. They went thither at the end of October, when the few days of the latter summer were reigning on the hills and in the woods, and thus the place looked less desolate than as Rachel once saw it before in the winterly Christmas weather.

The Oliver Warleighs showed themselves as

gracious towards their guests as it became them to do towards accepted future connections, but from the first Rachel could not bring herself to like Lady Georgiana. She was a tall woman, stiff rather than stately, though well made, and her face was exceedingly white—clay-white, and deeply pitted with the small-pox. Her eyes were pale yellowish grey, and the brows and lashes so light as to be scarcely perceptible at a distance; her hair was a dull towy flaxen, dressed in the most ornate style its natural frizziness would admit of,—altogether an exceedingly plain woman with a mean type of face and commonplace features. The children, fortunately for them, took after their father rather than their mother; and Mortimer, the eldest boy, was extremely pretty. Rachel made quite a pet of him, but Katherine and Grace had such a dislike to their sister-in-law that they could hardly help carrying a little of it on to her children's account.

Lady Georgiana was a remarkable disciplinarian—even her ten months' old baby felt her power and obeyed it. One day she offered the tiny victim to Rachel's arms, but not liking the face of a stranger, it naturally set up a small pipe of a cry, when Lady Georgiana immediately withdrew with it to the next room; after a few minutes' absence she returned,

the atom sitting up on her arm with its feathers composed, and again she offered it to Rachel's embrace, but again baby gave way to an irrepressible wail. Rachel felt quite ashamed of herself, and apologized, saying she was afraid there was something about her he did not like; to which Lady Georgiana replied in her hard voice, "Oh, no, not at all, not at all; but my children are inclined to cry at the sight of strangers, and as it is a trick I particularly dislike, I endeavour to cure them of it at every opportunity;" and a second time she vanished behind the door. When she reappeared baby went to Rachel without a whimper, and was as good as gold. For a mother, Lady Georgiana was a wonderful woman, and did not err on the side of tenderness.

The first evening John Withers and his sister were at Whinstane, Mr. and Mrs. Hill came to dinner. The good old rector and his wife were very kind to Grace and told her Arthur was soon coming home. Her sad countenance cheered a little, but it was nothing to be compared to Katherine's jubilant brightness. Happiness was a new state of being to her, and she carried the lustre of it in her beautiful face. She was softer in manner too, and her very voice had another tone.

Whinstane was undeniably a pleasanter place to stay at now than it had been during that first memorable visit of Rachel Withers in Sir William Warleigh's time; but it was provoking both to her and to her brother to watch Oliver exercising his airs of mastership when they remembered who ought to be living and ruling there. His sisters did not seem to have power to say a word in furtherance of their own wishes; Lady Georgiana had her carriage, but they had no carriage, and *now*, no horses to ride. Sir William only left each of his daughters five thousand pounds at her own disposal, and three hundred a year for life, charged on the estate; not fortunes commensurate with his great wealth by any means; but Oliver had profited to the extent of their loss.

The first night when Rachel went to bed, she heard Lady Foulis, as usual, making the darkness mournful with the drone of her organ. It was not so sad at this time of year, when she could set her window open to listen; and this she did, looking up at a sky where was no moon, but which was bright with innumerable stars. How was it that standing there, with the wind on her brow, and the sound in her ears, there came over her heart and her brain all that had passed between then and now? All the

sun-bright hopes, and shadowy doubts, and dark realizations of the doubts—all the little love-passages, and vex words, and mortified tears that had put her out of the pale of youth, and made of a gladsome girl, a serious and grave-eyed woman. They came and went, and her face was wet again, and the sob in her throat again; and she said her prayers and God comforted her; and the morrow came like any other day, and nobody knew or cared that she had seen ghosts last night. She was a reticent little woman, and kept her troubled visitants from the other world of memory to herself.

Lady Foulis sent for her once during her stay at Whinstane, and from certain allusions she made, Rachel understood that she knew of the disappointments that had befallen her. There was no special reference made to them, however, and the weird old lady seemed better pleased to prattle on the theme of Katherine's going to be married. "And Grace too, *Grace too*," she added, with an emphatic gesture of her head. She had become somewhat hard of hearing, but she still fingered her organ as incessantly as ever. If we think of it, what a consolation it must have been to her during her half-century of captivity! Music would be the last passion, the last sense to forsake her.

When she was told by what name Sir Laurence's little daughter had been called, she testified extreme distress, wringing her withered hands and crying: "Oh, unwise, unwise! There was never an Annis Warleigh lived to be good and happy yet. It was my name—it is under a curse, under a curse!"

Katherine, in speaking of this to Rachel, regretted that the name which was coupled with disaster and dishonour to their house whenever it had been borne by a daughter of it, should have fallen to Laurence's child. But Rachel, with the warning of Helena and the White Hands strong in her recollection, said that if these family traditions were not so mischievous they would be simply ridiculous. Impress an imaginative mind with the idea that it is born to sorrow, and the prophecy is very likely to work out its own fulfilment. Idle words often sink deeper than the speakers mean they should. If the first Annis Warleigh was faithless to her husband, a poisoner, a witch, and everything else that is wicked, her descendants were surely not bound to take after her! Lady Foulis had undergone penance enough in her own person to wear out any curse.

Katherine heard her say her say, and then reiterated with unconvinced pertinacity:

"All the same, I wish she were not called Annis. She will be either very bad or very unlucky."

"Then," replied Rachel, "let us trust she may be only unlucky!"

IV.

Early in December Arthur Hill returned to England, and perhaps nobody was very greatly surprised when it was announced that two weddings instead of one would take place at Whinstane in the course of the ensuing spring. Grace and he needed only to see each other to set their troubles straight, and a Christmas morning letter brought the good news to Hurtleddale Rectory, where no news could have been more welcome. Rachel was cordially glad for her friend, and to John Withers no brother-in-law could have been so acceptable as Arthur Hill.

Now and then the thought of how she should dispose of herself when her brother married had intruded itself very sadly on Rachel's rest, but she early made up her mind to one thing—she would not go on living at the rectory. Married folks were best left to themselves, and besides she had no fancy for taking a secondary place where she had been

mistress. She liked to order and manage about a house, and if she were to remain, she should constantly be putting in her oar where she ought not. It was nonsense of John to talk about Katherine's wanting her to teach her household and parish ways; Katherine must learn for herself as she had done. Perhaps it would have grieved her never to have had the offer of a home with them made to her, but when they had done their affectionate duty, she began to think in earnest of doing her wise one. She was sure a way would be made clear by-and-by, and meanwhile she looked round her in patience and hope.

Let her lot in life be what it might, Rachel Withers would never be otherwise than what we call a happy woman. It is worth a fortune to have a cheerful temper and an easy adaptability of character. She could thrive in any soil, and it must have been a black cloud indeed through which her eyes could not discern any portion of the silver lining! The secret of it was that she could enjoy the present, and throw herself heartily into little passing pleasures; but she had no great enthusiasms, and one step at a time in life was enough for her. She was not given to daily self-anatomy as practised by heroines, but she did her duty as far as she knew it, and became in

process of time calmness and patience personified; precisely what her mother had been before her in her later years.

While Rachel was considering of her future lot, her godmamma Grandage was considering of it too; and after mature deliberation she made her the offer of a permanent home at Prior's Bank.

"While I live, live with me: when I am dead you will find yourself sufficiently provided for," said the old lady very kindly. "I want company, and I hate the idea of a hired companion; I was always in an agony lest Betsy Briggs should get hold of me, until she came into her fortune and Mr. Gilsland married her; but now I feel comparatively safe. It seems to me that you are thrown on the world, Dumpling, just at the right moment to be picked up and adopted by me; for I must have somebody soon, if I don't have you. Go home and talk to John about it."

So Rachel went home and talked to John about it. As far as she individually was concerned, she would rather go to Prior's Bank than not, she said. Bittersweet was fond of her, and they were as much used to each other's oddities and quiddities as if they had lived together for years. Old as Mrs. Sara Grandage was her mind was serene, and her wits as bright as ever; while as for her habits, the only risk would be

of their proving too active for her goddaughter. At Prior's Bank she should still be in the midst of friends, within reach of the schools and of some of her other work with which Katherine's coming to the rectory need not necessarily interfere.

John heard all and said little—he would not have liked to live with Bittersweet, if it were only for her untiring vivacity of speech; but he knew his sister's patience, and thought perhaps she might be able to bear it. She was of a conversational turn herself.

Rachel and her godmamma had the matter over several times again before anything was finally decided, but as they were the principal persons concerned in the result, they determined at last to please themselves; and agreed that when John brought Katherine home to the rectory his sister should move to Prior's Bank.

In the prospect of her new home and its duties, Rachel could not help wishing that nature had endowed her with a warmer and more diffusive manner towards those she loved. Whether it was the violent check her affections had received, or whether it was only her characteristic reserve developing itself, she could not tell, but certainly her cold shyness and formality were growing upon her.

When it would have been appropriate to say something affectionate and cordial more often than not she was tongue-tied. She conscientiously warned Bittersweet of this, lest when they came to be always together, she should be disappointed; but her god-mamma professed herself not exacting of displays of tenderness, and comforted her not a little by answering to her avowals, "You are not so much cold as quiet, Dumpling, and I know you will prove very satisfactory to me. Demonstrative people's ways are pretty and touching, but they may be a bore and grow fidgety in private life. One is safer with a calm disposition in the long run, and permanence always pleased me better than vehemence." The energetic old lady was, at all events, disposed to make the best of her household companion, and next after John, Rachel certainly loved her now better than anybody else in the world.

In March the rectory had a thorough turn-out in preparation for the coming of its new mistress; and poor Rachel, with all her endeavours, could not keep away the little cloud of dulness which would creep over her now and then, as she went to and fro the house, directing and superintending the changes that had to be. And John was so cheerful!

"Well," said she, taking herself to task one day,

when she had been flatter than usual, "well, if this goes on, I shall turn into a sour, cantankerous old thing, resentful and envious of other people's happiness, and that would be worse to bear than all! Going to Prior's Bank will be a sort of new beginning of life to me—not so hopeful as the last, but I must begin it with a good heart. When life looks level and blank before one it is well to have won the belief that God knows best. In saddened moments a thought comes tempting me to fancy that I could have arranged my own lot more satisfactorily, but I am utterly resolved to feel and say that after all God *must* know best."

And Rachel's work went the better and her heart was the lighter for her Christian philosophy.

V.

The time flew very fast towards the end. One, two, three days, and Rachel Withers must say good-bye to the dear old rectory as home, and go to make way for its new mistress. She had a sort of leave-taking at the school and of her poor folks, feeling all the while as if a good cry would have eased her heart, but the tears refused to flow. They said that they should miss her; and she would like them to miss her

a little at first; though in time Katherine was sure to make up for her loss. She bade fair to become an excellent clergyman's wife.

Sir Laurence Warleigh declined to attend at the marriage of his sisters, and the ceremony took place with the utmost privacy in Penslaven Church; only Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the Squire being invited to be present.

The weddings over, John and Katherine set out for a month's tour in Scotland, and Arthur Hill and Grace departed to Devonshire, where he had been presented to a small living, beautifully situated on the coast. Rachel then went *home* to Prior's Bank, and very shortly afterwards the Oliver Warleighs discharged their establishment, and retired to live in Paris; leaving Whinstane Tower to Lady Foulis and the owls.

Sir Laurence Warleigh still remained faithful to the old Hurlmere House.



PART SECOND.

SIR LAURENCE'S LITTLE WILDLING.



CHAPTER THE FIRST.

ANNIS AT HURTMERE.

The sound of thy merry voice
~~Makes the old walls~~
Jubilant, and they rejoice
With the joy of thy young heart,
O'er the light of whose gladness
No shadows of sadness
From the sombre background of memory start.
LONGFELLOW.

I.

THERE was nothing about little Annis to remind Sir Laurence Warleigh of the sweet wife he had lost when she was born. She had russet-brown elf locks, large, bluish-grey eyes like himself, and a sturdy, wilful, fearless temper of her own as ever child was made with. She enjoyed her liberty unchecked and

unthwarted, and was perhaps encouraged to be despotic and imperious more than was quite good for her, because her small tyrannies were an amusement to those who loved her. Nothing the womenfolk liked better than to see her drumming with tiny fist low down on the door of the room where Sir Laurence sat, and shouting to him to open and let her in.

There had been an important revolution transacted at the Hurtlemere House soon after Annis began to toddle alone, which was a source of rejoicing to all concerned. One day, having evaded Lucy's watchfulness with that demure little spirit of mischief which was her strongest baby trait, she strayed down to the edge of the tarn, and there she was sitting in the sunshine amongst the reeds, when Sir Laurence happened to go thither to take out his boat. He picked her up, much as he might have picked up a terrier-pup, and Annis was as *game*.

She was used to see him from her nursery-window, and Lucy had taught her to call him Papa as she called a tree *tree*, and a horse *horse*; so when he lifted her to a level with his face, she gazed at him undaunted, lisped his name and poked out one of her wee fat hands to clutch his beard. Sir Laurence shook her; she chuckled, kicked, and crowed, and finally at his request, pouted two rosy

buds of lips and kissed him, until he ended by putting her into the boat and rowing across the tarn with her; to the inexpressible anguish of Lucy by whom her loss was discovered almost as soon as she disappeared. Sir Laurence kept her out with him until dusk, and a terrible weeping and wailing was going on round the borders of the tarn when he was seen coming home with the little gipsy in his arms, having left the boat on the further side of the water and walked back through the woods. Lucy with a loud cry dashed forward and snatched her away, sobbing with hysterical delight; for she had almost begun to think of the child as dead, and to picture to herself the drowned locks and dear baby face tangled amongst the bushes overhanging the water which might suddenly confront her and end her dreadful search.

Sir Laurence understood the case without Mistress Dobie's half-glad, half-angered explanations, and the same evening he put an end to Lucy's wretched anticipations of immediate dismissal for her negligence, by giving her a sovereign, and bidding her mind the child more carefully in future. Lucy in the fervour of her penitence and gratitude transferred the coin to the bag for the Catholic poor of Brafferton, and she could never for years after speak of Annis's

"blessed preservation" without weeping like Niobe. Mary Wray who had been some time returned to her husband's roof, but who loved the little creature as if she were bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, talked of going back to the Hurtlemere House to take charge of her foster-babe herself; but her master refused to spare her again, and instead she removed with him into the small farm near the Force, which Sir Laurence at this period granted them rent-free in acknowledgment of Mary's office to his daughter.

Thus out of an imminent danger had come a great good, and little Annis was no longer the only neglected thing in her father's house. From that day she was permitted to hang about his steps like any other doggie; he taught her to run on messages, to fetch and carry his boots, his slippers and his big pot of tobacco, and to lie down on the rug and fall asleep amongst the dogs when he wished her to be still. Annis soon learnt to love him far better than her nurses, fond as she was of them; hers was a warm heart that would cling faithfully to any one who caressed her; and her otherwise neglected childhood was certainly not unhappy.

Lucy said she was a tom-boy, but she thought her a precious darling, and would have quarrelled with anybody who should have dared to find a fault in

her miracle of perfection. It seemed never to occur to those who cared for and indulged her that it was in any way necessary to teach her the art of reading; and though from the lips of Mistress Dobie, who was a great adept at recitation, she had learnt a number of quaint old ballads which Sir Laurence set her to lisp at his knee in her clipt provincial dialect while he was smoking his pipes of winter evenings, she did not at four years old so much as know her letters. Lucy's own education was very imperfect, and did not compass the pronunciation of long words without spelling which was probably the reason why her views were so very lax. She brought the child up just as she would have brought up a child of her own, and being wholly trusted by Sir Laurence was rather jealous of any advice or interference from without. She was undoubtedly a well-principled young woman, and her constant affection cheered and warmed the motherless bairn; but kinsfolk and friends began to say that at four years old Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter should have other companionship and tendance than that of an ignorant young Romanist nurse how good and kind soever she might be. In some respects Annis was well done to, but in others there was much room for improvement. Winter and summer her clothing

was rough and plain, and not always either whole or cleanly; for the little maiden ran as wild out of doors as any cottager's child could do. One day her Aunt Katherine going up to pay a rare visit at the Hurtlemere House, saw the merry wee gipsy, without hat and tanned berry-brown, perched astride of a broad-backed cart-horse which Mathew Dobie was leading down to water, and shouting at the utmost pitch of her sound young lungs such encouraging ejaculations to Tinker as she had picked up from the farmer's frequent use of them.

It was on this occasion that Katherine first essayed a mild remonstrance with Sir Laurence, but he appeared to think that there was time enough yet to get his little wildling—who was only a better sort of pet dog to him—into training, and would not be prevailed on to subject her to any stricter discipline than that she now throve under. A truly disheartening account of her appearance and manners was then sent to Grace, who thereupon joined in the appeal, even offering to take the child into her own charge; for she had none of her own. Katherine might have wished to assume the responsibility too, but her husband would not have permitted her to add to her cares, even had her brother been willing to let Annis go to her; and indeed, her hands were

quite full enough with her own active, irrepressible boys—two in the house, neither of them yet steady on his pins, were anxiety and trouble enough for any reasonable woman.

By some means or other the rumour of changes affecting her foster-babe came round to Mary Wray's ears, and she esteemed it her bounden duty to go first to Katherine and afterwards to Sir Laurence himself to inquire how much or how little truth there was in what she had heard. She also gave them the benefit of her opinion on what influences were likely to affect her darling's destiny for good or ill, and suggested that if Annis must needs go from home to be made a lady of, why should she not be sent to Oliver Warleigh's wife who was an experienced mother herself, and who must know what belonged to bairns, having three of her own?

This was how Lady Georgiana came first to be thought of as the most eligible guardian for Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter. Her own children were patterns of proper behaviour, and though no love subsisted between her and her sisters-in-law, they were both fain to agree that there was sense and soundness in Mary Wray's suggestion.

But however the rest of the family might cabal for the rescue of Annis from the ruinous neglect and

indulgence in the midst of which she was flourishing as luxuriantly as an ill-weed could, Sir Laurence himself had not the smallest intention of parting with her; and this comfortable assurance he gave her foster-mother with his own lips.

"The bairn is but a bairn and can't be catching much that's amiss yet;" said Mary; but on the other hand it was very justly pleaded that refined habits are seed for early sowing, and that Annis ought soon to be transferred to the care of a gentlewoman if she was to grow up into a little gentlewoman herself. The manner of the change was the difficulty, and also how to bring Sir Laurence to consent to any change at all; but Katherine was convinced of the wisdom of it more effectually than ever, when she, on the occasion of another visit to the Hurtlemere House, heard Lucy instructing her niece in a Catholic child's prayers. Her Protestant feelings took the alarm, and she wrote forthwith to Lady Georgiana to sound her on the feasibility of Mary Wray's idea.

Three or four days after the despatch of this letter, Oliver Warleigh arrived at the rectory, perhaps more to the surprise than the pleasure of its inhabitants, but his welcome was quite sufficiently cordial to induce him to remain. He and his wife had

caught eagerly at the possible advantages which might accrue to them from having the care of Sir Laurence's child; and primed with all manner of plausible arguments in favour of the suggestion Katherine had made to them, he came over in hot haste to urge it on his brother in person.

II.

It was on a dull March afternoon that Oliver Warleigh first presented himself in his character of ambassador at the Hurtemere House. Sir Laurence was not indoors, but Mistress Dobie with a rather frozen welcome ushered him into a room adjoining that which his brother habitually occupied, and bade him wait. One leaf of the folding-door which communicated with the next room stood ajar, and looking through it, Oliver perceived that Annis was there; and he remained for several minutes watching her attentively, and listening to her monotonous chanting of one of those ancient ballads which were her only accomplishment.

Couched upon the hearth in the midst of a group of sleeping dogs sat the child, shaggy as any one of them, singing straight through the tragical song of "The Bonny Earl of Murray." At the close of the

last verse, she laid her head down on the broad side of one of the great hounds, stretched her little arm up over its neck, and appeared to be composing herself for a nap; but the creaking of a board under Oliver Warleigh's stealthy foot, made her turn and look round. When she saw a stranger she rose on her knees, gazed straight at him and said quaintly, "Who are you? You are not of this house."

"I am your uncle Oliver, my little petkin," replied he, and held out his hand.

The propitiatory gesture was not responded to. Annis got on her feet and stayed regarding him neither diffident nor afraid for some moments, as if she were considering his claims to her favour, and deciding on them as extremely trifling. "A bold little lass," thought he; but he made a second advance by asking if she would like to come and sit on his knee. "No," was the blunt response; and after watching the intruder suspiciously for another minute or so, she made a sudden rush past him and escaped out of the room. "A wild little lass," thought Oliver Warleigh again, and sat him down much disconcerted in his brother's chair.

Though it was scarcely more than midway the afternoon, the day was so overcast that already it was growing gloomy indoors; but he flung some

logs out of the wood-basket upon the fire, and as the pine knots kindled and blazed up the dim twilight was suffused with a warm and pleasant glow which penetrated into the remoter parts of the large room. But the ruddy fire-shine only brought out into greater prominence its dreary, comfortless nakedness; on the panelled walls no picture, on the oaken floor no carpet, and the scant furniture of a rude and cumbrous antiquity. It was not the east room which was used when Helena was alive, but the long-abandoned dining-hall, which in old times re-echoed with mirth more loud than wise when Moor Murray entertained his boon companions after a hard day's sport. The aspect of Sir Laurence's daily abode for these four years past, revealed to Oliver Warleigh more of his brother's actual life than could have done the amplest spoken details. Its atmosphere was one of a thousand pipes; guns, dog-whips, fishing-tackle, and other kindred articles ornamented every corner and recess; while several slovenly heaps of books and magazines, strewn hither and thither upon the floor, were indicative of Annis's constructive skill in castle-building; other toys than these paper-bricks she had none.

As his eye took in each dull detail of this gloomy scene, Oliver Warleigh marvelled more and more;

he lost patience in thinking of Laurence. "Every pleasure of life within his reach, and not the spirit to enjoy anything!" soliloquized he. "There was never a woman trode shoe-leather yet worthy of such sacrifices to her memory! And that gipsy-bred little monkey heiress to Penslaven and Whinstane—if I have any discernment concerning natural attraction and antipathy there will not be much love lost between her and my Lady Georgiana when they come together."

For two hours or more he waited in the dreary, half-lighted room for his brother's return, his only amusement being to grasp the poker, strike the smouldering logs, and then watch the routed myriads of sparks fly up the wide chimney. At last the outer door opened, Sir Laurence's heavy step crossed the hall; and sensible of a sudden and uncomfortable flush of embarrassment, Oliver rose from his seat by the hearth and listened. There was first the sound of Mistress Dobie's voice, announcing his own arrival, followed by a few minutes of dead silence, which seemed to the anxious visitor to lengthen and lengthen themselves out as if they would never end. He experienced some very nervous fluctuations of courage while every instant expecting his injured brother to confront him; but he looked

outwardly self-possessed enough when the door opened, and Sir Laurence, entering, stood face to face with him for the first time since they were boys together at Whinstane Tower.

They were quite strangers to each other's appearance now, but they shook hands mechanically, and Sir Laurence was the first to speak, though what he said was as little like a fraternal greeting as it well could be. "Over here on business?" he asked; and Oliver answered with strict truth, "Yes, on business of importance."

"Going on to Whinstane?" inquired Sir Laurence again.

"No; they have put me up at the rectory," was the reply.

"It is close upon dinner-time, will you remain and dine with me?" was the next suggestion, one to which Oliver readily acceded.

And that strange meeting was accomplished, courteously and coldly as a meeting between two strangers!

Sir Laurence then immediately turned back to the door which he had left open, and called aloud for Annis, who came running as swiftly as her little feet would carry her, but paused irresolute when she perceived who was still in possession of the

hearth. Her father put an end to her indecision by taking her up in his arms and carrying her to the fireside, but all the while she kept the eyes of suspicious watchfulness on the unwelcome guest; and Oliver Warleigh did some violence to his feelings when, by way of smoothing an avenue to conversation, he remarked that she was a fine child.

"She is like my mother," answered Sir Laurence, and sat down with her on his knee.

Oliver acquiesced, though in reality he could not see the faintest shadow of resemblance—that brown, elfish mite like their beautiful mother! He grew quite sarcastic over the idea inwardly; thought paternal partiality might claim some allowance, but when it reached such a stage of blindness as that, it became only pitiable and ludicrous. With certain persons a little contempt for their company induces a remarkable degree of ease and assurance, and when Oliver Warleigh discovered this weakness in his brother to despise, he found his wits and his tongue loosed, and began to talk fluently in spite of the discouraging brevity of Sir Laurence's replies. He gave his brother a sketch of his own promising young family unasked.

"Our boys take after the Warleighs, and fine,

well-grown lads they are. Mortimer is a very fine lad for six years old," said he, "and his tutor tells us that he shows talent; but these are early days yet to judge of what he may turn out. As much depends on temperament as on capacity, and he has a lazy, pleasure-loving turn such as is not commonly the making of successful men. But he will have to fight for himself—both my boys will have to fight for themselves, for I shall have nothing to give them; so it is lucky they are blest with abundance of mother-wit."

It did not appear that Oliver Warleigh was deficient in paternal partiality any more than Sir Laurence. He then went on to say that Lady Georgiana and he were returning to England permanently in the spring for their children's sake; and expressing himself as entirely in favour of public school education, asked his brother what was his opinion about it. Sir Laurence could not profess to have any opinion, or to pronounce on the advantages or disadvantages of a system of which he knew nothing. Then Oliver pressed him with the inquiry whether he thought his own training at home had been good, to which he unhesitatingly replied, "No; as bad as bad could be."

"So it was," agreed Oliver; and then he felt his

way cautiously on untried ground by saying that if Sir Laurence had gone to Eton, or Harrow, or Rugby as a boy, he would scarcely be burying himself alive in Hurtleale now; and concluded by asking if he never meditated making any change in his manner of life.

To this his brother abruptly replied, "What change should I make?" and Oliver suggested that he should return to Whinstane or take Penslaven into his own hands. Sir Laurence answered that he liked the Hurtlemere House better than either, and continued, half absently, to stroke the rosy-flushed cheek of Annis, which was next the fire, as if she were the pervading influence of his reverie, until Oliver, with adventurous boldness, said, "And what must this poor little gipsy lose by being allowed to grow up wild in such an out-of-the-way spot—~~she~~ who must inherit two of the finest estates in the north, unless you alter your mind and marry again."

Sir Laurence started as if he had been stung, and exclaimed, harshly,—

"Have you travelled all the way from Paris to ask me ~~that~~? You might have spared yourself the pains!"

And then he got up and strode out of the room,

taking the child with him. His suspicions of the purport of his brother's undesired visit were evidently aroused; but Oliver did not allow himself to be discomposed; he had won a hearing, the object of his embassy had been approached, and though, for the moment, he found himself flung roughly back, he should know how the better to approach it again at a more auspicious moment.

Sir Laurence reappeared without Annis when dinner was on the table, and Oliver, discreetly avoiding all recurrence to personal topics, plunged into the troubled sea of politics, foreign and domestic, and at length succeeded in entangling his brother in an argument on the respective merits of the rival statesmen of the day, between whom party feeling ran high. Dinner over, they drew their chairs to the hearth, and Sir Laurence ordered Annis to be sent in again. Oliver would have preferred her absence; and when she came, carrying in her two hands, and propt against her breast, a box of tobacco with a couple of pipes carefully balanced on the top of it, he fancied himself transferred to the parlour of some way-side inn, with this small brown maiden to wait upon the travellers. Sir Laurence asked him if he smoked, and when he said, "No, Lady Georgiana had broken him of the habit directly after their marriage,

and he had never attempted to resume it since," his brother replied that Lady Georgiana was unwise; it was a moral sedative; blue devils, black devils and all other evil humours vanished in a cloud of good tobacco-smoke.

Annis busied herself in filling her father's pipe, using her little thumb for a stopper, and having seen it alight and curling up in white, fragrant wreaths, she appeared to consider her evening duty done, and diverted herself in various ways about the room. At last she settled on her knees by one of the jambs of the chimney-piece, and with a handful of tobacco, abstracted from the box, proceeded to dress in shaggy wigs all the grotesquely carved heads within her reach that embellished it. Oliver Warleigh could not keep his eyes from following the restless movements of the child. He watched her pat the lantern-jaws, and pinch the high noses, and whisper in the great ears as if the things were human, and stick twists of paper in their yawning mouths and bid them smoke. She appeared to have invested each figure with a name and certain character, and to be enacting scenes in an irregular drama of her own construction. One long-featured, down drooping face, the topmost under the mantel-shelf, she addressed as *Sir Sumfit*, and two chubby little sons of Bacchus,

crowned with grape-clusters, as *Ye Babes*. The largest head in the centre of the jambe was the *Ogre*, and *Ye Babes* were warned with much shaking of Annis's elfish locks, not to come within snap of his great jaws. It struck Oliver Warleigh by-and-by that the imaginative little mischief was in some way or other connecting *him* with this grinning visage of which it pleased her to feign a shivering terror; for her eye glanced towards him twice or thrice, and then she committed an inaudible secret to the keeping of *Ye Babes*, and wagged her head with an air of great sagacity, as if desirous of impressing them with its profound importance. He should never forget the thing's antics as long as he lived, he said to Katherine, when he described this quaint scene.

There was no end to Annis's game until Lucy came to carry her away to bed; but first a biscuit was given her, with which she fed her playfellows, and then was taken on Sir Laurence's knee for a final interval of petting before good-night. Oliver looked on with some impatience while the two discoursed in their little language, and was thankful when it was over; and Annis, having strained her father's head to her bosom with all the force of her tiny arms, and exclaimed, with passionate fondness, "I love you, papa; I do love you, papa," was handed over to Lucy.

But scarcely had the door closed upon them, than Sir Laurence, as if repenting him of an omission, laid down his pipe and followed; and the next moment Oliver heard the child's voice as it receded up the stairs, crying, "Good Donny, faster; trot, Donny, trot!" and, with a rather mean curiosity, he peeped out and saw that his brother was clumsily feigning himself a horse, and giving her a ride to bed.

Oliver laughed when he told this to his sister, and it was not a kind laugh; he thought Sir Laurence a fool and the child as spoilt a little baggage as ever breathed. But Katherine spoke up in their defence.

"I love Laurie for his tenderness," said she, her mother-feeling kindling in her eyes. "I think it is beautiful; and she is a dear wee darling with all her savagery, and only wants system and kindness to make her as docile as other children. I am very fond of Annis, Oliver."

Oliver replied, of course, of course; she was only over-indulged, that was all; but Lady Georgiana was a tight hand, and if ever she came under her rein, she would very soon be broken in. No doubt she would!

When Sir Laurence rejoined his brother, Oliver

dextrously contrived to turn the talk once more towards the main object of his embassy, and though Sir Laurence puffed a silent cloud, and seemed little inclined to enter on the conversation, he harangued about Lady Georgiana's skill in the management of children, and the paramount necessity of implanting good early habits in the young in a way that would have done credit to a commissioner of education. Thence he diverged to the remoteness of Hurtleddale from all means of instruction; and at last, with sudden earnestness he appealed to his brother to know if he intended keeping his fine, clever little daughter much longer without opportunities of learning; adding, that he had heard from his sisters how she was not even being taught to read.

Sir Laurence replied abruptly that he did not think any change yet necessary.

"The child might be fourteen instead of four, to hear you talk! She will do very well as she is for some time to come. Katherine and Grace have attacked me already, and I have desired them to give themselves no anxiety on my daughter's account."

"You can never send her to school; she would break her heart under the tedium of formal discipline," said Oliver, pressing the charge; "yet the longer she

runs wild the more severe will restraint be when it must come."

To this Sir Laurence answered that he had no intention of exiling Annis from home. Then Oliver suggested again that it would be by no means easy to induce any lady capable of giving her an education suited to her rank, to come and live at the Hurtlemere House. Sir Laurence responded that no idea of bringing a stranger thither had ever occurred to him; but he now saw that some scheme in which Annis was concerned was labouring for delivery in Oliver's breast, and he bade him impatiently speak out, and not fence any longer with the question.

Then said Oliver, uncertain for the moment whether he was most relieved or disconcerted by the sudden challenge,

"You have conjectured rightly. The women are more anxious for their little niece's welfare than you suppose; and amongst them they have devised a plan which they declare excellent; this plan is that you should entrust Annis to Lady Georgiana; besides her two boy-cousins, she would also have our little Clara, only a year younger than herself, for a play-mate, and everybody who has to do with children knows the value of equal companionship."

Sir Laurence listened in an embarrassing silence, his face betraying nothing of how he was affected, and it was not until the proposition had had several minutes to sink into his mind, that Oliver, perceiving he did not intend to speak, ventured to ask, "Well, Laurence, how does it strike you?"

"I have never seen Lady Georgiana," was the reply.

"But you could see her, either here or at Bristowe," said Oliver. Again Sir Laurence smoked on in mute meditation, and again his brother was reduced to the expedient of asking a direct question. "Will you meet her if she comes over?"

"You must excuse me, Oliver—No," was the brief answer; and after a few minutes' pause Sir Laurence put an end to the debate by saying, "We will not talk of this matter any more. Lady Georgiana I do not know, but you made yourself my enemy; and if my sisters had behaved to Helena as they ought to have done her child would have stood in need of none of their kindnesses now. They mean well, perhaps, but I am not disposed to hear their advice or to be indebted to them for any help. If you have come over specially with this object, I regret that you should have taken so long a journey for nothing—a letter would have answered the purpose quite as

well, and have been much less costly in every way."

"I shall not regret it since it has given me the chance of shaking hands with you again after fourteen years, Laurence. We are friends now, are we not?" returned Oliver, plaintively.

"It was not my fault we were ever otherwise," said Sir Laurence, affecting no enthusiasm of gladness at their reunion. Oliver sighed, and there was silence between them for some minutes. The old clock in the hall striking eleven broke it, and warned them that it was time to separate.

"They keep early hours at the rectory, I must be going," said Oliver, and rose with a show of reluctance.

"I will walk with you down the hill," replied Sir Laurence; and the brothers turned out together into the cold starlit night.

At parting the elder suggested a hope of seeing Oliver again before he left Hurtle Dale, a hope which Oliver gratefully encouraged. Sir Laurence was not so insensible to the elixir of society as he imagined; it was an unconfessed pleasure to him to see his brother's face and hear his voice once more, notwithstanding all that was past and gone; and at their next meeting he invited him to transfer

himself from the rectory to the Hurtlemere House, which Oliver did with a good deal of secret, wily exultation.

III.

Nobody, of course, supposed that Oliver Warleigh undertook his mission in behalf of Annis from purely disinterested motives. His wife had brought him a fortune, but by all accounts she was a frightfully extravagant woman. Paris was an expensive place of residence, they kept up a showy establishment, and their family would now begin to increase in wants with each advancing year, so that the temporary guardianship of Sir Laurence's daughter with a handsome allowance would have been a very acceptable adjunct to their other cares. Thus far Oliver had gained nothing, but he had lost nothing either; and to have re-established a footing in his brother's house, closed against him for so many years, was a desirable end achieved.

He was witness to some rather curious incidents behind the scenes at the Hurtlemere House. The first morning when he descended from his room, trim and stately, he found Sir Laurence in a rough frieze coat of genuine Brafferton cut, just rising from

his finished breakfast. Annis also was there, done up with a napkin under her chin, eating porridge and milk with excellent appetite. She took the opportunity of the slight diversion caused by her uncle Oliver's entrance to carry her nearly empty platter to the chimney-piece, and was just in the act of putting a spoonful into the Ogre's mouth, when Lucy appeared and prevented the accomplishment of her hospitable designs. Annis was not too well pleased at the interference, though she allowed her dish and spoon to be transferred to the centre of the table beyond her reach; and the setting of her lips and perverse little twist of her shoulders betrayed the smouldering rebellion which broke out into frank resistance, when Lucy offered a hand to lead her from the room. Stubbornly entrenching herself amongst the dogs upon the hearth, she braved her mild monitress with a naughty eye, and dared her audibly to touch her. Lucy wisely did not attempt it, and after a little ineffectual coaxing, she glided out of the room as noiselessly as she had come in, leaving Annis triumphant.

Oliver Warleigh was very disagreeably impressed by Lucy's position at the Hurtlemere House. He told Katherine that she had the air of a person accustomed to consideration and even deference.

He professed to discern in her craft and force of will, and the coolest self-possession, all demurely veiled under a modest simplicity of self-respect that was plausible and well enough acted to deceive anybody less versed in the wicked wiles of human nature than himself. Katherine laughed merrily at his ridiculous suspicions. Worldly wisdom may sometimes be a light to the eyes, but almost as often it is a mere misleading Will-'o-the-wisp; and in this instance it had certainly tempted Oliver Warleigh's discernment astray. Lucy knew that she was pretty, and she had that natural love of limited power which is a trait in all intelligent persons of her sex; but she had no more designs on Sir Laurence, which his brother implied she had, than upon the man in the moon. She had plighted her troth a couple of years ago to the eldest son of Robb, at Prior's Mill, and it was to be a match as soon as he could stock a farm and furnish a house to take her to. But the vexatious idea Oliver had conceived concerning her, tipt his tongue with blackest gall of bitterness in speaking of his brother; he said to Katherine that Sir Laurence appeared to him to have degenerated into an absolute boor, and predicted that he might very probably, if the progress of deterioration continued, end his long mourn-

ing for Helena by the commission of the greatest of all possible follies—that of marrying her maid! A pleasant end for him to chew, this; and his sister did not succeed in convincing him how more than absurd was his fancy.

Annis and he, by his own candid confession, did not grow in each other's good graces; though the evenings passed not unpleasantly at the Hurtlemere House. He became more anxious for the success of his mission every day he stayed there; his earnestness arising from a desire to get Lucy away along with the child. Yet he steadily refrained himself from the topic that was uppermost in his thoughts, and when he and his brother were alone, laid himself out to amuse, telling his best society stories in his best society manner, that he might not risk losing all by over eagerness in pressing a distasteful subject.

Sir Laurence smoked his meditative pipes and said little, but his brother's company was becoming very pleasant to him. It was long since he had entertained friend or kinsman at his lonely fireside. At distant intervals appeared his steward, Mr. Bond, and at still more distant, John Withers spent an evening with him, and these were the only two guests Annis knew as bearing her father company.

She liked to see Mr. Bond and John also; for the

first brought her gingerbread, and the second set her up to say a long ballad, and always commended her proficiency with a pat on the crown; which, as Annis loved praise, was perhaps as acceptable as the spice-cake. But the new stranger who called himself uncle Oliver, was by no means so welcome; some instinct deeper than reason warned her against his surface cordiality, and she kept watch over him in a spirit of distrustful defiance which she was too young to dissimulate.

One evening she was invited to display before him her powers of recitation, but she left Sir Sumfit and Ye Babes reluctantly, and when perched on her father's knee for the triumphant exhibition, with a precocity of malice, which would express itself by parable rather than not at all, she proceeded to chant the Ballad of The Babes in the Wood, addressing the narrative portions towards the dogs, and the denunciations of the cruel uncle towards her kinsman with the oddest little naughty look sparkling in her eyes that ever child wore; and when requested to bid him proper good-night afterwards, she turned suddenly, took a long stare at him, shook her elf-locks and decamped. Oliver Warleigh laughed, but there was neither laugh nor love in his heart, and it was by no means a benevolent aspiration when he

wished Lady Georgiana had her! But even Lady Georgiana might meet her match. She was equal to icing a baby's tears, but whether she was equal to icing the passionate blood of such an one as Sir Laurence's little wildling was yet to be tried.

On another occasion he witnessed an awful instance of her waywardness and of her father's indulgence which had a worse effect on his temper than any demonstration of dislike towards himself that had preceded it. One evening he proposed to his brother a ride to Bristowe for the next morning; the weather being fine and the roads good, why should they not go? Sir Laurence did not say why not, but he demurred—could not Oliver go alone? Oliver replied that of course he could, but a ride over the moor was pleasanter in company than in solitude; he did not urge the matter, however, and at breakfast he was in no way surprised to hear his brother announce that he had changed his mind and would go to Bristowe; but he was surprised and annoyed too when Sir Laurence added that Annis would accompany them in fulfilment of an old promise to Mrs. Damer Warleigh.

"Can the little monkey ride so far?" he asked, darting a very sharp glance at the small porridge-devourer who faced him.

She nodded her head and said, "Farther," without the addition of an explanatory word.

Oliver Warleigh resigned himself. The elfish mite seemed to have penetrated his feelings and to be enjoying his vexation with imp-like malice. Breakfast over, the horses were ordered, and when Sir Laurence and his brother went out they found Annis already mounted on her black pony, a swift, sure-footed, handsome little beast, docile to her hand and word as a well-trained dog. She was clad in a heather-coloured habit of rough Scotch cloth, and wore a boy's cap, with a silver thistle in front, tied under her chin. She was as fearless and as much at home on her pony as amongst the dogs on the hearth, and her uncle Oliver reluctantly admitted to himself at last, that the little gipsy, in spite of her dark locks and nut-brown skin, was a very beautiful child.

Annis was a chatterbox; her tongue wagged fast, and for some distance she absorbed the chief part of the talk; but by-and-by when they came to where the road turned across the open moors, she would have cantered off by herself had not her father, though he loosed the leading rein, bidden her keep close by his side. He looked down at her from time to time very thoughtfully and very fondly as if he were turning over in his mind some design

fraught with pain to both. And so it presently appeared that he was. Peremptorily as he had at first refused to entertain the proposal made to him of entrusting Annis to Lady Georgiana, it had since recurred to him as perhaps worth consideration; and he now introduced the subject himself by saying to Oliver that he supposed he should have to let his little gipsy leave him soon, though it would be very hard lines for her, go when and where she would.

Oliver had much ado to repress the thrill of triumph that stirred in his heart at this unexpected symptom of yielding on his brother's part; but he replied with an air of sympathy and encouragement that she was young enough yet to be very easily moulded to new manners. He then led the conversation to Lady Georgiana, pleasing particulars of whom he was fluent in detailing. After some general remarks on the advantages of living abroad, he went on to state his intentions with reference to a home in England, and to expound all the beautiful plans for the bringing-up of an heiress with which his clever wife had primed him beforehand. Sir Laurence heard him patiently, and though he said it would be much against the grain whenever he let her go, he acknowledged that it might very probably be her best chance of good training and good treat-

ment; and perhaps with an ulterior view of insuring both, he made some reference to the money part of the negotiation which Oliver airily set aside as quite secondary; though anybody who knew him must know that it would be his chief consideration.

The affair had got into this promising cue, while Annis, trotting demurely at her father's side, heard every word; a stormy resolution gathered up in her dark little face as she listened, and at the climax, she wheeled her pony suddenly round, gave him a smart stroke with her whip, and galloped back over the moor as fast as it would carry her; believing that she was immediately to be decoyed away and given up to her wicked uncle! Oliver Warleigh was for instant pursuit, but Sir Laurence lifted a hasty hand and bade him hold back, crying aloud, "Mind the quarry, my birdie," and then Annis was seen to draw rein, to swerve into a lower track, and so to continue her homeward flight straight as an arrow from a bow.

"That danger's over, thank God!" said Sir Laurence; "Brownie will carry her now safe to his stable door. But you see what she is, Oliver, and it cannot be helped. I must ride after her, but you go on to Bristowe."

This, however, Oliver was secretly too much

provoked to do—besides he wished to see the end of the sprite's adventure.

So far from being ashamed of her misconduct or afraid of any consequences, Annis was sitting in the sun on the steps outside the porch awaiting her father and uncle; and as soon as they appeared she ran to the former and, clinging to his hand, laughed and danced up and down with high spirits as if she had performed some admirable feat for which she expected to be praised. But Sir Laurence looked grave, and lifting her up in his arms, asked if she did not know she had been very naughty, on which she rubbed her soft little face against his, curled round his neck, and with wily caresses refused to see or to know anything but that she was papa's darling with whom he could not really be angry. He kissed her before he set her down, but he attempted no further admonition, neither did he apologize to his brother for his being disappointed of the ride to Bristowe; and when Oliver would have reverted to the momentous theme which her flight had so inopportunately interrupted, he entreated him to let it drop.

"It will not do to send her away so young—she is unmanageable except by Lucy," said he, impatiently. "We may perhaps talk of it more

seriously when she has got another year over her head. And even then there will be woeful scenes to go through, for her love is strong and her will is strong, and her temper has never known the curb."

So much the better reason, Oliver thought, that it should learn to know it without any further delay ; but after Sir Laurence's decisive words he felt that, for the present, it was advisable to consider the negotiation at an end.

IV.

Though Oliver Warleigh had not succeeded in the chief object of his mission, he could not be said to have had his journey for nought ; for while he was at the Hurtlemere House Sir Laurence promised to undertake all the charges of his eldest boy's education and future launch in the world. Oliver had represented himself as almost an object for charity, and told him that but for Lady Georgiana's fortune they could barely have lived ; and that as the boys grew up and went to Eton, they should have to practise a severity of economy that neither of them would relish. His sister Katherine was very incredulous of these statements ; for she knew that he had carried away from Whinstane and Penslaven, far more of

spoils both before and after his father's death than he had any right to, and that if he was poor now, it could only be by his own and his wife's fault. She did not know whether most to admire Sir Laurence's generous forgiveness of Oliver, or most to fear what looked like a weak return of trust and confidence in him; Laurence had not a grain of falsehood in his own nature, and therefore could not suspect his brother of persistent guile and double-dealing. Oliver was a clever and specious man, but true he was not; and when she perceived how much more he wanted Annis as a prize for his pocket than for the child's own good, for a little moment she felt more bent on circumventing than on helping him.

In Sir Laurence's resentment against those who had not acknowledged his poor young wife, there was no taint of vindictiveness—though he hardly forgave he could not condescend to persecute; and when he found himself looked up to as the wealthy head of the family, he did with a free hand what was expected from him. Oliver was astonished at his generosity, but he was not touched; his heart was not of that nature which can be touched by magnanimity or made grateful by benefits.

The brothers dined at the rectory together one evening, and John Withers, who had not seen them

side by side for nearly fifteen years, was struck with the conspicuous difference between them ; far greater now than when they were boys. The elder was the taller man by a couple of inches, the better built and the handsomer in feature, but his gait was become heavy and slouching, he carried his head down, and his dress differed in no wise from that of the rudest yeoman farmer in the dales—a stranger might have supposed him to be one of them without discrediting his discernment in any measure. Oliver, on the contrary, who inherited the high-bred delicacy of his mother's face, and had lived the life of gay society under the tutelage of a wife, clever, fond and fashionable, was a mirror of grace, polish and surface courtesy ; but he was extremely disagreeable to some people notwithstanding. His brothers-in-law disliked and distrusted him, and old Mrs. Sara Grandage bestowed on him the epithet of *serpentine* ; to Rachel Withers he was just the same velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws as formerly ; so smooth and sleek, but yet with a deadly spring in him and a cruel, ruthless grip under his bland softness.

He fancied he had taken pretty Lucy's measure, but she had taken his with a much shrewder accuracy, and had told Mary Wray that she hoped Sir Laurence would never let Annis out of his sight—

"at least not in *his* hands;" which insinuation had thrown Mary into fresh anxiety about her foster-child. From the moment Oliver Warleigh entered the Hurtlemere House, Lucy's spirit had revolted against him; for treacherous as his conduct towards his brother had been, the popular voice had magnified it, and with many his name was a byeword for cunning and cruelty. She watched and saw the observation he spent on Annis; and the weight he attached to her words and ways; and when she felt that he doubted *her*, her doubt of him redoubled; for why should he cast an evil eye on *her* unless because she was the child's most active guardian?

However, relief to all those who feared and suspected him was at hand. Having no further temptation to remain in the monotonous seclusion of Hurtleale, Oliver Warleigh betook himself home again to his Lady Georgiana in Paris. Sir Laurence said to Katherine: "He was in haste to begone;" and she detected a strong undercurrent of disappointment in the way he spoke. Oliver was catwitted; he could see and seize an immediate advantage; but he was not apt at reading the subtler sentiments of any heart less self-absorbed than his own, or he might have guessed that his hurried departure as soon as he had gained all he was likely

to gain, would leave a harsh impression on his brother's mind. It did so. A good and generous feeling had been blighted in Sir Laurence, but the natural warmth still lingered amongst the embers of his life, which, drawn together by a tender and faithful hand, might still have kindled again into heat and flame. His sister Katherine perceived a sensible change in him during the week Oliver stayed at the Hurtlemere House; he had yielded to a belief that for some little love of him, some real though late repentance, Oliver had sought him in his solitude; but his prompt flight when he had made the utmost profit out of his brother's generous mood, had quite despoiled him of that pleasing imagination. For a little while after, Sir Laurence seemed sterner and less contented than before his visit.

One day Annis went down to spend the morning at the rectory with her cousins Dicky and Andrew, whom she tumbled about like nine-pins on their nursery-floor, and being asked if she was not sorry to bid her uncle Oliver good-by, answered without reserve, "No, she was very glad."

"But he is going to send you some toys all the way from Paris," urged Aunt Katherine in reference to a promise of his.

"I don't want any, and he shall not come back

here. He is ugly—I don't like him; he wants to take me away from papa, but I won't go!" answered the child, emphasizing her resolution by casting down on the floor one of Dicky's doll's tea-cups, which was broken in its fall; but she had no repentance for the disaster in that fiery moment.

The little gipsy had comprehended all the length and breadth of the family plots so far as she was personally concerned, and further talk with her elicited no modification of her first expressions of antipathy. She was particularly strong on the point of her uncle Oliver's ugliness; and to a child's instinctive discernment, notwithstanding his handsome features, he might be ugly; for there was no kindness in his heart, and no pretence of it in his manner, and his countenance was often darkling and bad.

A general feeling of distrust was thus all Oliver Warleigh left behind him as the result of his first embassy to the Hurtlemere House; and he went away not altogether unconscious of it.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

OLIVER WARLEIGH'S SECOND EMBASSY.

One may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

SHAKESPEARE.

I.

ONE afternoon early in the month of April Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel Withers were driving leisurely up the lane by the Force Farm when they saw Lucy waiting in the garden and Annis swinging on the gate.

"How do you do, Annis, and how is papa?" cried Bittersweet, nodding out of the window at the child. Annis only stared and went on swinging, but the sound of carriage-wheels brought Mary Wray into the porch, cloaked and bonneted as if for a walk. She made a gesture which caused Clip to pull up his horses, and running down into the road, apologized for the liberty she took in stopping them; but said she was going to the Hurtlemere House to nurse

Sir Laurence, he was ill, he had got a fever, and wanted somebody handy to look after him.

"I thought maybe, Mrs. Withers didn't know; happen you'll call an' tell her on your way back," added she.

They promised to do so, and then Mary, snatching Annis from her dizzy elevation, took her by the hand and set off in haste up the pastures; while Lucy, at a sign from Rachel, delayed a moment to give them a little further explanation.

Sir Laurence, she said, had been ailing for more than a fortnight past; he had caught a cold which he could not shake off, but he had refused to have Dr. Beane sent for until this morning, when his sufferings had increased so much as to make medical advice imperatively necessary. The doctor did not foresee danger, but he said Sir Laurence ought to have been in his bed a week ago; and would not promise him a good deliverance without quiet and caution now. He advised that Mary Wray, whose skill as a sick nurse was of the highest repute in the dale, should be sent for; so Lucy had brought Annis out for a walk, and summoned her straight-way.

"We need not alarm Katherine," said Mrs. Sara Grandage, as the carriage drove on. "We will just

tell her Sir Laurence is not well, and that Beane has seen him—a strong man like him cannot risk much from a feverish cold.”

This was Bittersweet's way; being as tough as bend-leather herself, she never believed anybody else could ail much.

But when they stopped at the rectory to deliver Mary's message, they found that the ill-news had flown fast enough to get there before them, and that both John and Katherine were gone up to the Hurtlemere House themselves.

“Annis was as gay as a lark, so it cannot be very serious,” then said the old lady; “and even if Sir Laurence has a good bout of fever it may be all the better for him eventually; it will purge away old melancholies, and make a new man of him. I would not pull a long face yet, Dumpling, if I were you.”

Dumpling did not know she was pulling a long face, but she was thinking it would be a woeful day for Sir Laurence's little wildling if anything happened to him. She had never given her adhesion to the scheme her sister-in-law had conceived of sending Annis to be brought up by Lady Georgiana. She knew them both, and felt sure Annis would not take kindly to the polishing processes by which her little

cousins were made such perfect specimens of obedience and propriety. It seemed almost wicked, all the conspiring to take her away from her father whom she worshipped, for the sake of handing her over to the formal charities of that freezing wife of Oliver's. What a martyrdom of clipping and training the hapless little mortal would have to undergo before her civilization was accomplished ! What matter if she did say a few Catholic prayers and hymns, and recite a few rude ballads in a provincial dialect ; she had better grow up heathen or savage than dwindle and die under the icy manipulations of Lady Georgiana !

All this Rachel thought, and all this she said to her godmamma, who was much inclined to take her view of part of the facts ; but who believed that Katherine's anxiety to remove Annis from the Hurtlemere House was greatly augmented by her desire to see Sir Laurence make a change in his method of living. The one alteration she hoped might lead to the other.

In this Rachel acquiesced ; she knew well how both his sisters mourned his alienation from society and from themselves. The outward courtesies of kinship were observed between them, but Sir Laurence had never forgiven their neglect of Helena's letter

and of herself. On his unjust persistence in blaming them, they never commented; they thought *now*, indeed, that if they had dared their father's wrath and disobeyed his commands it would have been right; but as for poor Helena, she was not made to grow old! They might have rejoiced her brief life with their kindness, and have crowned her early departing with one longed for, inexpressible comfort; but her death came from the hands of God and none other; and not all the love in the world could have stayed it for a single day.

II.

Little Annis, much against her will, was transferred to the nursery at the rectory during her father's illness, and immediately the news of it reached Paris, Oliver Warleigh hastened back to the Hurtlemere House.

Sir Laurence had a hard and sharp struggle for his life, and when the crisis was over, a long languor succeeded to the fierce trouble of his delirium. Oliver watched him with a haggard anxiety, and as soon as Dr. Beane pronounced his brother saved, he seemed almost like to give up and die in his stead! John and Katherine advised his speedy

departure to Hastings, where Lady Georgiana had just established herself in lodgings with her children; and when the worst was past, he followed their advice. It was time he went; unless his nervous excitability got some rest soon, he would be laid up himself; and he felt it.

He looked half worn out, and Bittersweet maliciously said,—

“He is going to be ill of Sir Laurence’s getting better!”

Other people besides Bittersweet thought he was disappointed at the issue, but of course they spoke low when they spoke so; except Rachel Withers, who replied to her godmamma’s sarcasm, “God forgive me if I wrong him, but I do believe he is the only person akin to Sir Laurence who does not rejoice in his safety!”

After a month’s stay at the rectory, Annis went home again, and a most sensible relief to her aunt Katherine her departure was; for the charge of her during this time of trouble had been as onerous as the charge of a freshly-caught wild animal. She was constantly on the watch to circumvent Lucy, and run away home to her father. She was quiet enough now that she was back with him, and would sit in his room by the hour together as still as a

mouse, without either speaking or moving; only resting her cheek against his lean hand as it hung down over the bed-side, and caressing it with her wee soft palms.

"Make the most of your time, loving little Annis: it will not be for very long now," he said to her one day.

"I am going to stay with you always, papa," was her reply; so he left her in her blissful delusion.

But the decree had gone forth; the verdict that pronounced Sir Laurence rescued from his imminent peril, pronounced their separation;—as soon as he could travel he would be allowed neither rest nor peace until he went away—so decided Bristowe, so also Katherine and John. Dr. Beane would not guarantee him another year of life without a thorough change of habits, and against that sentence even his own obstinacy could not stand firm. Annis seemed to be the only impediment, and everybody was utterly resolved that she should not stand in his way. Oliver said little—perhaps he was not just then capable of saying much; but when he went to Hastings, he knew that so far as Annis was concerned, the day was his own; for his brother's extremity had brought round his opportunity.

The child was not warned of what awaited her, but gentle measures were adopted to wean her from some of her wildest indocilities. Lucy adopted towards her the most tenderly protective airs; for she and Mistress Dobie had a quarrel on the subject of Annis's behaviour.

Said Mistress Dobie:

"She's a lile lady, an' must ha' a lady's bringing up. Miss Katherine and Miss Grace, when they was her age, was twice as forward an' high learnt, an' boo' an' curtsey they did as pretty as my lady herself; but Miss Annis an't got no manners at all, an' you pettles her ower much by half."

Then Lucy protested:

"She don't want no manners; she is a deal better without if they'd make her as proud and hard-hearted as her aunts!" for Lucy had not forgotten one slight passed on her dear, dead mistress.

Everybody was agreed that when Annis went, Lucy must go with her—to break her fall as it were; and though Robb's son at the mill said he should "be wanting her at the back-end," he was told that he must have patience a little longer. But he had got the promise of the Upgyll Farm which the present tenant was leaving at Lady-day; the

summer would see the house duly renovated and made ready for its pretty mistress, and after harvest he declared he would brook no longer delay. Therefore if Lucy went away with her darling at all, it must be soon.

The main change was generally regarded as settled, but the nearer it came to be made, the more uneasy grew Mary Wray as to whether it would be quite safe for her foster-child to go to her uncle Oliver's house. Lucy had infected Mary with her own distrust of him, and as her difficulty and distress about it were too delicately personal to be laid before the rector's wife, she brought them down to Rachel Withers and unfolded them before her.

She began by saying that Lucy was "rather a chancy body for taking likes and dislikes; she was full of her megrims, and did Miss Rachel think there was aught in them?"—a question much easier to ask than to answer.

"Lucy says she can't abide him—nayther art nor part of him," proceeded she, recapitulating the young woman's precise expressions. "She don't like his slant eyes, nor his voice that he always drops as if he was afraid of the hearing of his own words, nor yet his way of turning about, an' peeping, an' listening. He's deep an' he's sharp too. I once

thought him a fair-spoken gentleman enough, but nor me now nayther, Miss Rachel, I shouldn't wish to come under his grindstone. I saw him while master lay ill, an' it wasn't *his* good wishes nor *his* prayers that mended him. Show me a pattern o' the stuff an' I'll tell you what t' piece is. Talk o' Sir Laurence being a hard man; he'd stand up front to his enemy, but Oliver, he'd stab his i' the back, an' lick th' knife after for th' sweetness o' revenge!"

Mary Wray used strong words when she warmed to her subject, but the strongest found an echo in Rachel Withers' heart; though she did not dare add the weight of her own feeling against Oliver Warleigh to the doubts Mary entertained. She afterwards spoke to her godmamma about what had passed, but Bittersweet gave another testimony. "I do not believe that Oliver Warleigh's passions will ever carry him over the borders of the most respectable vices," said she. "He is quietly lavish, grasping and self-seeking in practice, but his moral theories are of the best. He is a plausible, skilful, cautious person, and I daresay he will live all his days in success and end them in peace and honour—unless, indeed, the devil assail him with some very strong and safe temptation."

Rachel in the face of this opinion would have been ashamed to confess her own suspicions, but her mind misgave her sorely in secret that the choice of a new home for Annis was about the worst that could have been made. But the responsibility was none of hers; her voice was never heard in the matter from first to last.

III.

About the middle of May the first step towards the ultimate change was made by Sir Laurence going over with Annis to Bristowe, where Oliver Warleigh and Lady Georgiana were to meet them in the course of a few days. Annis was in blissful ignorance of what was preparing for her, and played round her father and Lucy as merrily as at home. Rachel Withers had gone to Bristowe as Katherine's deputy, she being detained at the rectory by her own urgent private affairs; and the quiet, kind soul was as thankful for the respite to Annis as if she herself were on the point of being consigned to Lady Georgiana's guardianship. It is impossible to say that Annis was a *good* little girl as good little girls are commonly estimated, but she was very loving and very lovable; as truthful as the light, and so

brave by nature that nothing daunted her. Everybody at Bristowe took to her amazingly.

Arthur Hill and Grace were there—Grace rather invalidish, as she always was, and now seeming more so because she showed herself aggrieved that Annis was not to be entrusted to her. But Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the common sense of the family generally, had been against her undertaking so weighty a charge from the very first; Lady Georgiana, with her robust health and successful practical management of her own children, appeared to every one except Rachel, Lucy and Mary Wray, much better suited to it.

There had been a tender leaving-taking between Mary and her foster-child before Annis set off; and so, for that matter, had there been between Annis and her pony, the dogs, Mathew and Mistress Dobie, and even Sir Sumfit, Ye Babes and the Ogre; but this was the little gipsy's first going away from home, and though she was allowed to believe that she should return within a week, it was still a mighty serious occasion.

Lucy had leave of absence from Hurtleddale for three months, at the end of which term of probation it was hoped that Annis would be sufficiently settled and at home with her cousins to dispense

with her services. Lady Georgiana strongly objected at first to her going with the child at all, as likely to do more harm than good; but Sir Laurence made such a point of it that she was compelled to yield her opinion to his. Lucy also had a decided feeling on the matter, and even expressed herself as exceedingly *jealous* of what might arise out of an arrangement which she had from the beginning thought wrong. But whatever anybody thought, the chief persons concerned were not warned, and were not suspicious of any possible mischief; and those who feared, and those who doubted of results, could now but keep such fears and such doubts to themselves, and hope for the best.

Sir Laurence was gaining strength, but the grey pallor of recent illness still showed in his face, and it was quite touching to see Annis with her brown and rosy visage pressed up against his, that he might catch some of her colour, as she said. They were almost constantly together, and Squire Damer Warleigh often made a third with them, being all the more welcome probably when he brought two or three dogs in his train. The wilful little gipsy disdained the mild amusements of the morning room, and always made haste to escape from the blandish-

ments of the womenkind, to the society of any creature out of doors. Annis was much more partial at this date to the other sex than to her own. Towards her aunt Grace she betrayed a manifest disfavour by reason of her having indiscreetly proposed a daily reading lesson; she was now supposed to have conquered the alphabet, but she passed a by no means triumphant examination when Rachel Withers tried her with the big letters on the top of a reel of thread. Still she had a wonderful memory for anything learnt by rote, and a very brief spell of training and teaching would bring her up to the level of the most "high learnt" children of her age. She was strong and hardy as a little mountain pony at this period, and tumbled down and picked herself up again with many a bruise and graze, but never a thought of tears.

"You need not be anxious for her, she will take a great deal of killing," said Mrs. Damer Warleigh, when Grace expressed some doubt as to how she would bear the total change and separation.

A great deal of killing! well, even that was a sort of comfort to reflect on in case Lady Georgiana should prove a martinet. Everybody would naturally have felt more uncertainty as to the issue of the

experiment had Annis been a frail, delicate sprite, instead of the tough little wildling she was.

A few days longer of her happy unconsciousness went by; then the Oliver Warleighs arrived, bringing their eldest boy with them, and a change came suddenly over the spirit of her dream. Oh! the resentful countenance she showed to all around her; what deep gloom in her eyes, what resolute indignation on her set lips! The intensity of her wrath was hardly childlike; so helpless, yet so strong was it that it seemed more like the amazed rage of some entrapt animal. In vain Mortimer coaxed her to play with him—she would not stir from her father's side. When he was out of doors, there was she, hanging to his hand; when he was indoors, there sat she on the floor embracing his leg, and defying every one of them with her slow, dark glances.

Lady Georgiana was serene and amiable; nothing disturbed her cold placidity. Said Grace to her one day half crying, "It will never do; the child will break her heart!" To which her sister-in-law replied, laughing at her serious air, "Nonsense! things of that age have not found out yet that they have any hearts to break. Away from her father she will forget him in a month!"

Rachel Withers was present, and her quiet spirit

rose at this. "Forget her father in a month—no, that will she not!" cried she. "I would back Gipsy's remembrance of those she loves to outlast some of ours by many and many a day!" Lady Georgiana gave Rachel after this quite a shivering *feel*; it might be prejudice, but whether from prejudice or a well-grounded reason, she could not endure her.

Oliver was quite at home in the situation—plausible, kind, considerate, and anxious to put everybody else at ease. His eldest boy, Mortimer, was really a clever, well-behaved little fellow, perfectly obedient, and yet not cowed; he loved his stony-bosomed Spartan mother, watched her eye, forestalled her commands, and seemed to let his very thoughts move only under her authority. It would need many, many weary efforts of coercion to trim Annis into this perfection of order and discipline.

One night after she was gone to bed Sir Laurence and Rachel Withers had a little talk together about her. He said, "You are the only woman who was kind to Helena except Mrs. Damer Warleigh; and you are the only woman her child takes to."

Rachel replied that Annis was more familiar with her face—that was all.

"I wish from my heart she were to be familiar with no other," rejoined he; and then he got up and walked away looking perplexed and gloomy. Presently he came back and began to ask if Rachel approved of Lady Georgiana. What could she say? She told him she thought her very successful in the management of children.

"Yes," muttered he; "but Annis manifests more repugnance to her than to any of them—it is just the scared shyness of the filly to the rough rider who is to break her in."

Here Oliver interrupted them and challenged his brother to a game at chess.

It was not Rachel only who had conceived an aversion for Lady Georgiana when domesticated with her in the same house. Mrs. Damer Warleigh's kind heart yearned with pity over the child as the time for her departure drew near; and her change of mood testified to her fear and loathing of her future guardians.

"I wish I had never meddled in the matter," she said to Grace soon after Oliver and his wife arrived; "and the Squire does not half approve of it either. 'Tis a pity Kate could not take her—but then Kate has her hands full, and Laurence perhaps would not have consented."

“Kate could not manage her, and the difficulty of keeping her from running away to the Hurtlemere House would have made their lives together a continual fight,” replied Grace; “but she might have been suffered to come to *me*. Arthur was not unwilling, and I could have found her playmates enough. She would have made up to me for having no children of my own. I shall always think they *might* have trusted her to me.”

IV.

Annis was not distinctly apprised of her destiny until the evening before she was parted from her father. On that last night Sir Laurence himself told her that in the morning she must go away with her aunt Georgiana and her cousin Mortimer, and that to please papa she must not cry but be a good little darling.

She never quite believed it until that moment; for she looked up at him with a dumb, imploring gaze, stretched her hand to his face, then hid her eyes against his breast and never spoke. She was making her mute resignation of his love. Only Rachel Withers was present besides themselves; and she

had not expected this, neither had Sir Laurence. Tears and violence they were prepared for, but not this silent agony. For ever so long a pin might have been heard to drop in the room. Sir Laurence sat with his face bent down over the loving little head,—a most pitiful tenderness in the whole attitude of him. By-and-by he got up and carried her into the quiet garden, all lovely with the freshness of spring, and walked about with her in his arms until dusk; then Rachel lost sight of them for a little while, and about nine o'clock he came into the drawing-room alone. Rachel went to peep at her before going to her own room, and found her fast asleep, with Lucy sitting by her pillow softly sobbing—she said it was a shame, a cruel shame, so it was, to take the poor little bairn from her father, and she wished they might not all live to repent it!

The next morning before anybody had moved from the breakfast-table, Sir Laurence's horse and Annis's pony passed the window—he was going to ride with her one stage on her journey. The rest of the travelling party were to follow in the carriage half an hour later.

And that was the last glimpse any of them at Bristowe had of the dear, pretty gipsy, perched on

her beloved Brownie, and gazing round from face to face with dark, dry eyes: *theirs* were not dry.

"It is like the grief of a woman!" sobbed Grace as they rode away, the Squire walking down the avenue beside Annis, and endeavouring to make the scene more cheerful with buoyant, loud-voiced talk. Rachel ran up to the gallery window, and watched along the road until they were out of sight, but neither turned or looked back for a moment.

Mrs. Damer Warleigh expected Sir Laurence would return to Bristowe, but he did not; and when the servants came back with the carriage after depositing Lucy and the Oliver Warleighs at the railway-station, they brought a message to the effect that Sir Laurence had gone straight away to the Hurtlemere House after seeing his little daughter off.

"Did she fret?" Rachel asked of old James, the coachman. He couldn't say she did fret—not to be seen. She was a good plucked one, that was what she was!

The women would rather have heard of a storm of passionate tears than of that quiet, inward bleeding, so unnatural in a child—but they repeated to each

other for consolation old James's testimony to her courage. She was a good plucked one, that was what she was; and she would take a great deal of killing!

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